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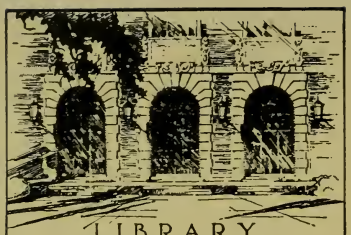

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WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE

VOL. III.

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WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE

By A. M. Donelan

AUTHOR OF 'FLORA ADAIR'
ETC.

'Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love'

SHAKESPEARE, *As You Like It*, v. 2

VOL. III.

HENRY S. KING & CO.
65 CORNHILL & 12 PATERNOSTER ROW LONDON
1873

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'WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE.'

CHAPTER I.

The heavens admit but one sun, and high places but one commander.—WIT'S 'COMMONWEALTH.'

CHARLES owed Alfred much, and was his junior by some years, yet his affection towards him was like the protecting love of an elder brother, who possessed a source of consolation and support still hidden from the younger and which he had not energy enough to seek. Charles was therefore doubly pained at the thought of separating from him without being able even to share, if not to lighten, the weight of Alfred's trouble whatever it might

be, but he could not force his confidence, and they parted simply with a promise to write regularly to each other.

About Christmas Charles mentioned casually that he was again suffering from the ague which that unintentional cold bath at C—— had brought upon him, but which rest, and the unusually warm season afterwards at Maurpton Castle had appeared to cure effectually. Charles did not tell his friends that as spring advanced the attacks became more severe, and that he grew thinner and weaker; this information he gave only to the doctor. Sir James Hall said he must not expect to get well until the summer-time, when he should go to some of the Brunnen of Germany.

In the Easter-week, however, he became subject to spasms of pain in the left side,

accompanied by a sensation of icy coldness which somewhat alarmed him about himself, and he took advantage of the first opportunity to speak privately to his medical friend.

'I can bear the truth about my own condition,' he said, looking earnestly at the doctor, 'but my sister must, as far as possible, be spared all anxiety. I am always afraid that she may have inherited our mother's delicate constitution. It will be better then for her and for me that I should be the first to know if my life is seriously threatened. I count upon your good faith to answer me with perfect candour.'

'These spasms from which you have lately begun to suffer are always more or less dangerous,' replied Sir James; 'as yet I cannot tell whether they proceed from any organic affection, or merely from nervousness

produced by the shock of your accident. If the remedy that I am about to try has any effect upon them, and you regain even a little strength, all may yet be well; but if after another month the spasms have increased in frequency or violence, and no marked improvement has taken place in your general health, I could not conscientiously encourage you to hope.'

Charles thanked Sir James for his sincerity and accompanied him to the door with apapparently undisturbed courtesy, but on returning to his study he sank back in the armchair exhausted by the great effort which he had made to sustain that outward calm. The doctor's words had sounded to him like a death-knell, the slight hopefulness implied in them carried none to his heart, and it seemed terribly hard to be called away then, in the

hey-day of youth, when he had just won the material battle of life, when his path no longer led him through rough and thorny places, but over rich pastures covered with the sweet flowers of home, affection, and friendship; his rare and unusual success had even appeared as if it were granted to him in order that he might return to be a protector to his fair young sister; and now, to leave her in greater loneliness than before—she would not have even the hope of his return—and with none to whose loving yet prudent care he could confide her! . . .

The anguish of the thought overwhelmed him, and from his heart went up the cry which his firmly-closed lips refused to utter: 'Not yet, O God!—not yet!'

Soon after the departure of Sir James Hall someone knocked at the door, and Charles

went to unfasten it, aware that his servant would not unnecessarily have disturbed him, against his express orders. A card of Lord Waters's was handed to him, upon which there were a few hastily-pencilled words, asking to see him for a few moments only.

Charles begged that Lord Waters would wait in the drawing-room, and crushing down the bitter pain that was burning within him, he followed the servant after a short delay.

Firmness of will was, perhaps, his most marked characteristic, and the instinct of command was so strong in him that he knew not what it was to contemplate failure in anything that he really desired to achieve, or to shrink from any difficulty. It was that instinct of command that, in his early youth had caused him to reject the bondage of

religious *opinion* and believe in nothing beyond what his own reason could infer—in nothing save a creative power.

Like that great French orator, however, who began his career as an unbeliever and ended it in the white raiment of a son of St. Dominic, Charles found that 'there are wants for which this earth is sterile.' His heart was as ardent as his will was strong, and it had craved for something higher than the creature, something immortal yet visible in the midst of creation, and bearing no mark of contradiction: until at length it had recognised that something in the humble crucifix held in the weak hands of a simple old man in the wilds of Australia—the same crucifix which, as a child, he had seen surrounded with all the pomp of worship in the ancient capital of Brittany; and in a

remote region of the new world he found it the centre of the same sacrifice, the same doctrine, as in that little city of civilised France.

'Every conversion must be a victory,' but Charles had to gain a double victory. Before he could be received into his Father's house, he had not only to submit to be taught like a little child, but also to break down his own will—that will which had hardly ever known what it was to relinquish a plan, a hope, or a possession—by making the greatest sacrifice which, for the moment, could be demanded of a strong passionate nature like his. Nothing compelled him; it was a voluntary choice between sacrifice and self-indulgence, and he chose the sacrifice. The first bitterness over, he had never for four years felt a misgiving or a doubt of the

divine goodness which had enabled him to receive the light of truth in spite of every natural obstacle.

Now it was otherwise; the sacrifice seemed about to be forced upon him, and it was not easy to distinguish goodness or mercy in the decree which demanded his life when that life was so needed by another weaker than himself, still unfortified by supernatural faith, dear to him beyond all expression, and whom he had vowed to himself never to leave until another protector had been given to her. As he advanced to greet Lord Waters with outward composure, the strife in his heart was unsubdued, still there went up the cry: 'Not yet, O Lord! Not yet. I cannot die and leave my sister alone in the world.'

'Forgive me, Lindsay, for having dis-

turbed you,' Lord Waters said, 'but I had not sufficient resolution to go away without asking you a question which I have long wished to ask, but which I have put off from day to day, fearing that it was vain to submit it to her whom it most concerns. The fact is, I love your sister; and I should like to have your good wishes for my success before I speak to her. I have waited until I can wait no longer. I shall leave England in a couple of months; tell me that I may hope to take her with me!'

Charles had started at the first words, and then he sat down, shading his face with his hand, whilst Lord Waters walked up and down the room.

'Why are you silent, Lindsay?' exclaimed Lord Waters. 'Will you not wish me success?'

'Not wish you success! . . . God only knows what a comfort it will be to me to welcome you as my brother-in-law. I was silent because this joy came upon me so unexpectedly that it overpowered me. . . . I have not been strong lately, as you know, and I shall never feel at rest until Milly is married. For this world, and still more for the next, you can endow her with all that is best. God grant that you may succeed. . . . You know that she is spending this afternoon with your cousin, Lady Chievers?'

'Yes, I know it,' answered Lord Waters, flushed and smiling; 'but,' he added in an altered tone, 'if I were not going away I would not risk my fate yet, at all events. I hardly dare to hope that—that she loves me. Good-bye, and wish me success again.'

'With all my heart! I shall never cease

to desire it for you until Milly's own lips have given me the glad assurance that you have obtained it. Good-bye, and God speed you !'

It seemed as if even his untrustful cry had been answered; and so gentle a rebuke in the form of a granted blessing, went straight to Charles's heart. In that hour the victory was virtually gained, even though another and a last trial awaited the victor; the earthly blessing which had appeared to make it easier was only 'one of those mirages which the traveller perceives on the horizon, and towards which he runs; in approaching it it vanishes; but that delusion has sustained his strength, quickened his steps, and led him more quickly to the true goal.'

CHAPTER II.

There grew a little flower once
That blossomed in a day,
And some said it would ever bloom
And some 'twould fade away;
And some said it was happiness,
And some said it was spring,
And some said it was grief and tears,
And many such a thing ;
But still the little flower bloomed,
And still it lived and throve,
And men do call it summer-growth,
But the angels call it love.—HOOD.

MILDRED came home about seven o'clock and went to the drawing-room, which she had evidently expected to find untenanted, for she started slightly on seeing her brother who was sitting on the sofa near the fire.

'Well, Milly, have you had a pleasant

afternoon?' he asked, surprised at her hesitation; he had expected to see her come to him with eager haste, all smiles and blushes. 'I hope to hear a great deal of news to repay me for your absence during the last four hours. Whom did you see or meet besides Sir Hugh and Lady Chievers?'

'Did you really miss me?' she said, seating herself on the footstool beside him. 'You look tired, too; I wish I had not gone out.'

All this time she had avoided her brother's anxious gaze, and Charles knew not what to think. He did not like to ask any direct question, not knowing if Lord Waters had seen her, yet he could not suppress his longing to hear more.

'Then you have nothing to tell me, little sister?'

'Forgive me for disappointing you,' she said softly, and raising her eyes to his with a sad, troubled expression. 'Lord Waters told me that it was in my power to make both you and him very happy, and yet I cannot, Charley.'

He made no answer for some moments; the disappointment was more keen to him than she could ever know. Lord Waters's proposal had appeared like a dew-drop sent from heaven to render his acceptance of the doom of death less hard; and had it fallen in vain?' . . .

'But why cannot you, as you say, make us both happy, Milly? Lord Waters has everything to recommend him: he is good, talented, handsome; what more would you have?'

'Indeed, I do not know,' she murmured,

resting her head against her brother's knee; 'but I should not like to marry anyone unless I felt that to be offered the privilege of accepting him was the greatest happiness that could be given to me.'

> Some chord in unison with what we hear
> Is touched within us, and the heart replies.

Charles's heart replied to his sister in the well-remembered accents of one of his most dearly-prized teachers in the new world that faith had opened to him. 'One is happy in choosing, one is happy in having been chosen. Nothing surpasses the original charm of that moment. When years have weakened other impressions that one remains in all its serene youthfulness, and takes us back to the happy days when it was our glory to choose and to be chosen.' Would he deprive Mildred of 'the glory of choosing'

by inducing her to marry one whom her own first wish was to reject. . . .

'If I were not so ill,' he thought, 'I could not do it; but as it is, must I not try to make her accept another protector, and one who would lead her to the "one thing needful" to render her perfect?'

'Yet you like Lord Waters; I have often heard you say so,' he said at length, 'and by becoming his wife you would give me inexpressible joy and peace. I am not well; I may not recover! How could I bear the thought of leaving you as you are? . . . You do not love anyone else. Oh, Milly, let me have the happiness of seeing your security, of feeling that you are not alone whatever may happen to me.'

'You have not been suffering since I went out?' she exclaimed, looking up with sudden

fear. 'It is cruel to frighten me so. You know there are few things in the world that I would not do in order to spare you any care or sorrow, but marry Lord Waters I cannot, Charley—I cannot, I do not love ——' An uncontrollable fit of sobbing choked her utterance.

'My child, what is the matter?' exclaimed Charles, alarmed at the effect of his own words. 'I only said that I *might* not recover—a possibility which we must all look forward to in illness; but if you agitate yourself in this way you will be ill, and then what shall I do for my little nurse? We will think no more about Lord Waters, only tell me if there is anyone else whom you would prefer to marry. This excessive nervousness looks a little like it, eh Milly?'

He tried to raise her head and make her

look at him, but in vain ; and her murmured but decided answer faintly reached his ears :

'Oh, no, no. No one!'

There was something in the tone even of those gently murmured words, that carried conviction with them, and her brother felt puzzled ; there was certainly nothing in what he had said about himself that should produce such violent agitation, and he could only try to soothe her.

Mildred had unconsciously enjoyed Lord Waters' society because he was Alfred Meredith's friend as well as brother-in-law, rather than from any attraction possessed by himself for her, and his proposal revealed to her the true state of her own feelings. With startled pain she recognised that Alfred was the object and the centre of her every thought and enjoyment, that her heart was

too full for any other, however charming and devoted, to hold a place in it. But she had a refuge, she thought, from all these troubles in her brother, she would be happy in his happiness. Therefore, the passing allusion to his possible danger sent a thrill of terror through her. Was she to lose the only sure resting-place that remained to her ?

At length she grew calmer, and went to her room to dress for dinner. During this occupation she came to the conclusion that she had been foolish in allowing herself to be so terrified without cause, and she resolutely set to work to banish all such fanciful—as she wished to consider them—forebodings of trouble ; so resolutely, indeed, that as time went on, and Charles's strength gradually declined, she would see no danger, and only longed for the warm summer weather

when he could resort to the German baths.

For the month of May they removed to a villa at Richmond for the benefit of country air, even before the season was far enough advanced for travelling. Just as they were settled at River View, Alfred surprised them by an early call. He had made all his arrangements for leaving England, but could not resist the desire to see them once more before his departure.

As he walked along the little avenue he espied Charles sitting in the ivy-covered porch before the door, but as he approached he was so shocked at the change in his friend's appearance that he could hardly speak. Charles watched him with a sad smile, and then told him how seriously ill he was, and that it was very doubtful if, when

the time came for the baths, he should be able to go to them. 'Mildred does not know all this,' he added, 'and the longer she can be spared any uneasiness, the better.'

What ordinary resolution could be proof against such a trial? Alfred felt that he could not leave his best friend, whose life was hanging upon such a thread, no matter what the danger to himself.

'I came to say good-bye to you, old fellow,' he said, trying to speak cheerfully; 'but now that I see you're a little out of spirits about yourself, I shall defer my journey until you are right again, and settled in your summer quarters in Germany. Maud and the children have also come to London, so that your sister can be constantly with them. I shall enjoy the ride here every day with the pleasant object of looking after

you and trying to cheer you. I wish we had Micky here; he would soon make you laugh yourself back to health again.'

Charles was more touched than he could venture to express in words; he remembered the strong manner in which Alfred had spoken of his determination to avoid making any stay in London, and he had come prepared to start forthwith for Paris; yet, in a moment, all his plans were set aside in the hope of being able to comfort *him* and do him good.

'Milly! come here,' he called, as he saw his sister pass on the other side of the glass door; 'help me to welcome Meredith, and thank him for the proof of real friendship he has just given me in offering to defer going abroad because he sees me a little pulled down.'

'You are the most ingenious of moral usurers, Captain Meredith,' she said, giving him her hand with a smile of welcome, which riveted poor Alfred's chains more firmly than ever; 'you lavish such favours unasked, and so often at a real risk or sacrifice to yourself, that you make your debtors feel they can never pay a sufficient interest of gratitude. I can't even pay my own debts, so I don't see how I am to help to pay your's, Master Charley; you must get well now, were it only from gratitude. Your recovery, I am sure, will indemnify Captain Meredith for the loss of this pleasant month in Paris.'

'I don't care a pin for Paris, even in May. I promised to meet a friend there, so I thought I ought to go; but the real temptation for me is to remain at home. I fear I

am not too sorry to have a valid excuse to do so; you see therefore, I am not an "ingenious usurer" in this instance, at all events; nevertheless, I shall expect your brother to get well in compliment to my care, and I mean to watch him pretty closely. Will you let me begin my attendance to-day, Miss Lindsay, while you go and see my wife, and the little people? I promised them a visit from you as soon as possible, will you go?'

'Yes, with much pleasure, and perhaps I may get leave to bring the children back with me, then we might take an early dinner, and you could take them home before dark.'

'Maud thinks the girls are old enough to be kept strictly to their lessons, but Eddy—happy child—is not required to do much as

yet, and there will be no difficulty in obtaining a half-holiday for him.'

'Well I'll try what I can do.'

A couple of hours later she returned with Eddy, who was alone permitted to escape from lessons, and whose delight thereat was increased twofold at finding himself again in the country with his favourite friends. He seemed to have inherited his father's love of boating, and pleaded earnestly for a row on the river, which certainly did look very inviting as it flowed past the end of the lawn sparkling in the bright sunshine. Charles declared that the child must not be disappointed, and that he felt so well himself he would enjoy half-an-hour's boating beyond everything.

None of the party ever forgot that short excursion on the Thames; it was to them

like the rich, soft light which sometimes precedes the fall of night. Eddy deserted even Milly, and seated himself by Charles, who had promised to tell him 'true' stories of the great woods and lakes, and strange people that he had seen in his travels; while Mildred's face showed all the happiness it gave her to see the good effect of his friend's visit on her brother. Alfred sat near her in a state of rapt enjoyment, only speaking now and then in a low tone, as if even the sound of his own voice jarred upon his ear at such a moment; he had procured for her an hour's happiness, and only wanted to be still, and see it sparkle in her eyes. Her spirits on the contrary became gayer and gayer; she teazed Alfred about his dreaminess, interrupted her brother, laughed at his stories, and as they stepped out of the boat

and saw the steeple of St. Paul's gleaming in the distance high above all the turmoil of London, she declared she believed her brother in all his travels had seen nothing more beautiful than that great church.

'I should perhaps agree with you, Milly,' answered Charles—as they walked slowly towards the house, whilst Eddy ran on with the Newfoundland dog, who, excited by his swim after the boat, now indulged in many a wild gambol—'were it not deprived of that hidden life which renders a church in the midst of a vast crowded city, especially beautiful and touching. It is sad to think that a thing admirable in itself should be as a sign-post of dissension from the first principle of beauty—unity——'

'But is it not you who desire to prolong that dissension—who reject the union

which we so much desire?' said Mildred quickly.

'Quite true, you know the most ardent passion of those who are *sincerely* out of the Church, is the passion of union. Union is the deceitful shadow of unity.'

'What, then, is the difference between union and unity?'

A great Christian philosopher has already answered that question. 'Unity is that which never contradicts itself under any circumstance. There is unity where there is no contradiction. You may have union because you may be too polite to quarrel, but the bond of unity is love, that you have not got, and without it religion is but a name. Contradiction is the death of unity; union, on the contrary, which is but the surface of unity may take place momentarily in spite of

contradiction, as we may touch each other without blending. The Church, which is truth and charity, proceeds by way of exclusion, whilst all heresies and schisms proceed by way of reunion.'

'A way, nevertheless, more remarkable for charity one would say,' observed Alfred.

'And so saying, verify these beautiful words—"How simple is truth! but the heart of man has infinite ruses against God. He arms himself with charity against truth; he opposes union to unity; he loves, he believes he is sublime, and he is not in the truth! . . ." As Mickey said, however, "plaze God it'll not be always so" as regards you Meredith any more than this dear little heretic beside me even, if I am to leave you soon."'

'You feel less well than when we started?' exclaimed Mildred, clasping her hands round

his arm, 'that nasty boating—yet how I enjoyed it at the time, you looked so well, and——'

'And so I felt, and still feel,' he interrupted, as he saw the same expression of terror in her face that once before he had seen there, when for the first time he had made a slight allusion to his possible danger; 'that "nasty boating," as you ungratefully called it, and this walk home will always be marked among the pleasantest memories of a most pleasant day.'

CHAPTER III.

On Nature's throbbing anguish pour relief,
And teach impassioned souls the joy of grief.
PLEASURES OF HOPE.

WHEN Alfred returned home he found Maud superbly dressed as if for some grand occasion. Joseph, she said, had most kindly managed to obtain tickets for the Oratorio that evening, though all the London world were eagerly contending for places, and he had arrived from Paris only on the previous day.

'You really have no time to lose,' she said, as her husband seated himself in an armchair and leaned his head upon his hand, 'you have to dress.'

'Maud, Lindsay is ill, dangerously ill, I fear,' replied Alfred irrelevantly; 'would that I had not induced him to make that tour in Ireland last summer, the accident at B—— is the cause of this misery. I cannot go abroad; I must do all that can be done to cheer him. Could I ever forgive myself if he were to die? It would break his sister's heart to lose him, so soon too after their unexpected re-union.'

'Well, this is another proof of what one so often hears, that if a man has no real troubles, he invents one for himself. It is perfectly absurd to hear you talk as if you were in any way responsible for Mr. Lindsay's illness. And so you have given up that wild project of going to Russia?' Maud added in her own mind; 'he will remain at home for the sake of others, not for mine!'

'I did not say I had given up the project; for the present it must be deferred. If Lindsay recovers I can go a little later.'

'And if he does not?'

Alfred stood up and walked towards the door. Maud saw that he was excited and grieved, yet she would not utter one word of sympathy. Had he shewn any towards her in arranging to go away without consulting her or in changing his mind because a friend of yesterday seemed to need him? Reproaches she considered beneath her, she would simply pay him back in his own coin—that of polite indifference.

'Please don't be long,' she said, as he turned the handle of the door, 'the carriage will be at the door shortly.'

'What for? Oh, to take you to the concert, but I am not going.'

'Do you wish me to go alone with your cousin? he has sent us two tickets.'

'Then take poor Mademoiselle Dubourg; you know she delights in that kind of thing, and to me—if your ladyship will permit me to say so—it is a bore!'

Without waiting for any further discussion on the subject he left the room, yet if Maud had spoken one gentle word of entreaty that he should accompany her he would have yielded. But no such word was ever spoken by his wife, and the contrast between her and Mildred was thus constantly brought before him. He had been very steadfast in his resolution to avoid all that could recall such a comparison, until the knowledge of Charles Lindsay's danger overpowered every thought of prudence, and, from the time of that first visit to the villa at Richmond, he

went there daily, drinking in unresistingly more and more of the sweet poison which lay for him in Mildred's presence. Even Maud was attentive also in her less impulsive way, she rather liked Charles Lindsay, and admitted to herself that it would be a sad trial for his sister to lose him just when he had come home after years of separation and made the world a place of light and joy for her.

For a short time Charles' health did seem really to improve, and the quickened pulsation of his heart when any one alluded to his recovery told that the old firm will to have everything arranged in his own way was not yet quite subdued. By the end of the month, however, the improvement had disappeared, and once again he took advantage of Mildred's absence with friends in

London, to ask Sir James Hall if he were to consider his former sentence as ratified. Sir James bowed, but muttered something about trying a new system, and Charles knew that hope was at an end for him.

God alone knew how sharp was that second and last struggle! then no promise of good for her whom he loved best on earth came to soften it. Perhaps the one thing wanting to make his acceptance of death a real holocaust and to crown all his former correspondence with grace, was that annihilation of the spirit of self-reliance which had always been so strong in him, and which rendered it especially hard to renounce the right to watch over his sister until she herself gave it to another.

That same evening when he heard her light step approaching his study door he

murmured, 'Into thy hands my God I confide her, take me when thou wilt!' The holocaust was made, and Mildred never knew how much of heroism there had been in his forbearance to press her more urgently to accept Lord Waters' suit, especially as he believed it would have sufficed to obtain her consent to tell her seriously that her doing so would take from the thought of death its sharpest sting.

Formerly he had been nervous and anxious about his health and also a little self-willed as to the way in which the doctor's directions were to be carried out; henceforth a marked change was observable, all trace of anxiety gradually disappeared and gave place to a calm cheerfulness. Mildred saw the change, but resolved to look on the bright side, considered it a sign of amendment—

the diminishing of a real cause of anxiety; she would not allow his increased devotion to all religious duties to alarm her, even whilst feeling there was something inexpressibly winning, yet subduing, in his new gentleness and patience. At times, however, in spite of her determination to 'hope on, hope ever,' the old terror seized upon her heart, and Alfred had more than once seen the tears trembling beneath her eyelids, yet forced back at the sound of her brother's voice or step, *he* must not be disturbed by any appearance of uneasiness in her. Alfred saw all this, saw her daily and hourly watchfulness never to allow a sad look to add to the sufferings of her dear invalid. The picture of that little household at Richmond overshadowed by death itself, yet rendered almost joyous by a generous and mutual

love which sought only to hide its own cares and cheer the beloved one, haunted him day and night, making his own home seem more cold and desolate than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

La défaillance d'un cœur surpris de sa propre gloire, et succombant sous le poids de son bonheur.

L'ABBÉ HENRI PERREYVE.

THE Lindsays intended to start for Germany in the beginning of July, but Charles settled in his own mind not to attempt the journey; intending, when the time approached, to tell Mildred the real truth about himself, he would spare her the sad knowledge as long as possible, especially as there was no alarming decrease in his strength.

He was in the habit of going to church every Friday to receive Holy Communion, but towards the end of June he caught cold

and the doctor gave strict orders that he should remain in bed for a few days; accordingly, his spiritual Father, the Rev. Mr. Herbert, who saw how it grieved him to forego the sacred Union, offered to bring the Blessed Sacrament to him.

On the previous evening Jeannette set about preparing an altar in her master's room; she brought a collection of fresh flowers in a basket, and, after filling the vases with water, she looked round hesitatingly, and said in rather a low voice: 'Mademoiselle knows how to assort flowers with great taste, if it would not derange her to place these, the altar would be so pretty.'

Mildred got very red—no, she could not assist in the decorations for that in which she had no faith, and for a moment she took no notice of Jeannette's hesitating request.

Then came the reflection: 'But it would please Charles; if he told me he expected some guest towards whom I felt no sympathy, although he honoured him deeply, should I spare any trouble in preparing a fitting reception, should I think of my own feelings instead of my brother's; and the guest whom he believes will come to him to-morrow he honours far more than any one in the world, why, then, should I refuse to arrange these flowers?'

'Very well, Jeannette,' she said at length, 'it shall be as pretty as my skill can make it.'

'*Comme Mademoiselle est bonne!*' exclaimed Jeannette, turning back to the basket of flowers in delight.

Charles had read the conflict between Mildred's wish and heart in the quick blush

and apparent inattention to the good old Bretonne's timidly-expressed desire, and, as his sister stood up from her place beside him, he caught her hand and pressed it in his own.

'Milly,' he whispered, 'I can only repeat her words, how good you are! it will make you very happy some day to remember this evening's work.'

In the morning, however, when she went to his room, about an hour before Father Herbert was expected, he told her that he had desired Jeannette to remove the flower-vases carefully and prepare the altar in the drawing-room.

'I could not help it,' he said, in answer to her eager remonstrances; 'as the time approached it seemed to me impossible to treat the Blessed Sacrament with less respect

than I would an earthly monarch. Do you suppose, were I a wounded soldier and our Queen deigned to come to the hospital to bestow on me some great mark of her favour that if it were possible I would not rise and go down to meet her rather than allow her to come up to the ward? Well, I expect a greater Sovereign and a more precious gift this morning. . . . Besides, I feel unusually well, no longer tired, no longer weary; you can't fancy how well and happy I feel, Milly; go, then, and see that your own gracious handiwork is properly replaced in the drawing-room, and leave me to dress.'

He drew her face down to him and kissed her. Mildred turned away, and silently left the room. She could not have explained even to herself why her brother's caress had so affected her that she could not utter a word

even in the hope of preventing him from committing an imprudence.

When he came down she and Jeannette were alone in the room, but even while arranging his cushions carefully, she forebore to ask how he felt after the exertion of dressing, for she saw that he was absorbed in other thoughts. Her hand still lingered upon the arm of the sofa, when a knock at the hall-door announced the arrival of Father Herbert.

The blood rushed up to the face of Charles, crimsoning it even to his temples, then as quickly receded. Some sudden feeling prompted Mildred to whisper 'May I stay, Charles?' yet five minutes before she fancied that nothing short of necessity would have induced her to remain.

Her brother bent his head in silence, and

a brighter expression even than before came into his eyes. Father Herbert entered and Charles stood up, saying in a low fervent tone as he went forward: 'DOMINE, NON SUM DIGNUS UT INTRES SUB TECTUM MEUM; SED . . .' he stopped, gasped for breath, and fell almost at the feet of the priest.

The servant who had barely closed the door turned back at the sound of the heavy fall, and assisted Father Herbert in placing him on the sofa, whilst Mildred, who for an instant had seemed stunned, cast herself on her knees beside him.

'He has fainted,' she cried; 'run, Jeannette, you know the remedies to bring, and looking up with a brave attempt at self-control she asked: 'He will soon recover, Mr. Herbert, will he not? Do you not think even now his colour is beginning to return.'

'It is all in the hands of God,' answered Father Herbert, with evident emotion, for one glance had told his experienced eye that never more would life's colour return to those blanched cheeks and lips. 'Had you not better leave us for a little, my child, whilst we try what can be done?'

He endeavoured to take her hands, but she drew them away and sprang to her feet.

'You do not mean that he is dead!' burst from her lips. She looked around with a wild glance of inquiry, then a gleam of joy flashed into her eyes as the door was flung open and Alfred Meredith appeared.

'You saved him once before,' she cried, hastening to him; 'you will ——', a convulsive sob caught her breath and she would

have fallen had not Alfred caught her in his arms; then, at a sign from Father Herbert, and preceded by the weeping Jeannette, he carried her to her own room.

CHAPTER V.

Qui n'est que juste est dur, qui n'est que sage est triste.
VOLTAIRE.

FOR one habit of his Indian life Alfred had always retained a marked predilection, that of a ride in the early morning. The country never appeared more attractive to him than at that hour, when, half veiled in the balmy haze which precedes the heat and glare of a summer's day, so it often happened that he rode out to Richmond before breakfast. On that Friday morning he knew Father Herbert was going to River View, and although some undefined feeling of anxiety prompted him

to turn the horse's head towards the villa he intended only to enquire for Charles, and return to see him later.

But on hearing that Mr. Lindsay had fallen in the drawing-room, it was supposed in a fit, he rushed up without waiting to learn any particulars, and thus it happened that he appeared at the moment when the awful truth that her brother was dead first dawned on Mildred.

A telegram had been dispatched to Sir James Hall, and a messenger sent for the doctor in the neighbourhood, who had also been in attendance. As Alfred re-entered the room the candles upon the altar were still lighting Father Herbert who, with his head buried in his hands, knelt at the foot of the sofa, and a servant stood behind, close to the table, upon which were some vials he had

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fetched in the vain hope of restoring animation to his late master.

'It cannot be that all is over, Mr. Herbert, whispered Alfred hoarsely, 'surely something can be done—such a death would be too awful!'

'Yet how sublime!' replied Father Herbert rising; 'What greater happiness could have been given him than to die from an ecstasy of love, at the thought of receiving his God under his own roof! May this recollection at least soften the grief of those to whom he was so dear.'

When the doctors arrived they could only confirm the sad truth, life was wholly extinct —in their language, death had supervened in consequence of a sudden rush of blood to the heart caused by violent emotion.

To Alfred that moment was one of un-

utterable bitterness. He had been powerless to save Mildred from this desolation, and he knew that the very ardour of his affection would debar him from being a source of consolation and support to her; yet, even at such a time Father Herbert's words made a deep impression on him, bringing before his mind with startling vividness the contrast between such a death and that of his own dear mother and uncle, from whose deathbeds all sacramental grace had been absent.

'We must now think of Miss Lindsay, Captain Meredith,' said Father Herbert, hoping to rouse Alfred from the torpor of grief into which he seemed to have fallen when, after the departure of the doctors, Charles had been removed from the drawing-room and laid upon the bed from which he had so lately risen, declaring that he felt un-

usually well, 'no longer tired, no longer wearied.' 'Had you not better send to inform Lady Maud of what has happened?'

'I will go for her myself,' replied Alfred, and hurrying from the room he rode back to London; the rapid motion seemed to deaden the pain knawing at his heart.

'Lindsay is dead, Maud!' he said abruptly, entering his wife's morning room.

'Gracious heavens! how you have startled me; you expressed no uneasiness about him yesterday. When did he die?'

'This morning. Jeannette will tell you all the particulars, I cannot talk about it. Mildred is alone; what ought to be done?'

'I suppose I had better drive out and ask her to stay here until she decides what she will eventually do. Lady Chievers likes her very much, besides there are her own connec-

tions, the Lovatts; no doubt she will have plenty of invitations as soon as this sad event is known, but I dare say in the first instance she would feel less strange with us than with any of the others; the children might help to distract her grief.'

'Thank you, Maud,' faltered her husband, he was so unaccustomed to have his wishes forestalled by her, that even this slight degree of sympathy, somewhat coldly expressed, was too much for his forced composure.

Mildred, however, refused gently, but firmly, to leave the home so hallowed by the memory of the last few comparatively happy weeks, and by the actual presence of her brother's remains. Maud then urged that at least she should have some friend to stay with her, but she replied with a slight shudder that she was not quite alone *yet*;

besides, Jeannette was far more than a servant to her—all other companionship would be unbearable just then.

Perceiving, therefore, that she could do Mildred no good, Maud left her after hearing from Jeannette all the thrilling details of her poor young master's sudden death. Alfred was disappointed, yet he felt that Mildred had only acted like herself in clinging to the last to one whom she had loved. The intervening time until the funeral he passed in a state of feverish restlessness; every day he rode out to inquire for her, but dared not ask to see her. After the first effort of going to fetch her away from the scene of her bereavement, Maud relapsed into her usual state of listlessness in regard to whatever did not concern herself; indeed, she began to consider her husband's deep dejection as a

sort of personal grievance, and answered very coldly, when on the eve of the funeral he asked if she intended to go to River View during the following afternoon.

'I think not,' she said; 'I showed Mildred that my desire was to surround her with all the consolations of friendship in the first instance, now I have a right to wait until she manifests a desire to see me.'

'Right! I hate the very sound of the word. How unbearably hot it is! Perhaps out of doors one may succeed in getting a breath of fresh air.'

Thus they parted for that evening, and, as it happened, not to meet again for several days.

CHAPTER VI.

Learn by a mortal yearning to ascend
Towards a higher object. Love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned for that end;
For this the passion to excel was driven,
That self might be annulled.—WORDSWORTH.

A SHORT time before his decease Charles had given Father Herbert a sealed letter addressed to himself with the superscription: 'To be opened after my death.'

'It is not,' he then said, 'that I fancy I am going to die immediately, but I wish to feel sure that in case of any unforeseen accident there shall be as little confusion and trouble as possible. You will find all the necessary directions for my funeral in that letter; our

kinsman Mr. Lovatt and my friend Captain Meredith will naturally be chief mourners. My lawyer has a duly registered deed of gift, transferring all my fortune to poor Milly, so that she will be spared all wearisome law forms.

Accordingly they were able to make the last arrangements without troubling Mildred. Alfred and Mr. Lovatt went in the first mourning coach, and a large number of carriages followed. When all was over and every one else had departed, Alfred still lingered beside the newly-made grave. Had he been a homeless outcast he could not have felt more desolate than at that moment. Where should he go? Return to his own house in Hyde Park rich in every attraction and luxury that money could give to it? He shuddered at the thought of

hearing his wife talk of what was due to her from one whose gentler heart was wrung with sorrow.

His own carriage had followed amongst the others, and at length the servant came to say that the coachman begged to know if he were to wait.

'No, I shall return by train,' answered Alfred hastily.

With no very definite intention in his mind he began to walk slowly in the direction of the villa; he would at all events hear from Jeannette how Mildred had borne that last parting—the terrible closing of the coffin, and the bearing away of all that remained to her of her brother, the presence of which was yet a sort of link with the past. Perhaps he had a vague hope that she would volunteer to see him. He felt that they *must*

meet again in all the freedom of the old intimacy, if only to say farewell. He knew that the best thing he could do was to go abroad immediately, and, therefore, the sooner he could get the pang over of wishing her good-bye the better.

He entered the grounds, but instead of going direct to the house he wandered down by the river, thinking of the day of his first visit there, when they all went out boating and yielded themselves willing captives to a bright but fading gleam of hopefulness. That conversation as they walked back to the house, on the difference between unity and union, recurred to him with a strange clearness; Charles's concluding words: 'If I am to leave you soon' had indeed been sadly prophetic.

A few steps further on was the little arbour

where they had rested. Alfred went up to it and pushed aside the foliage which overhung the entrance, there he stood as if spell-bound. In one of the rustic chairs, with her head bowed down on the little table, sat a slight girlish figure, robed in black ; her face was completely hidden, but anyone who had once seen Mildred would have recognised her by the natural wreath of golden hair encircling her head.

She had evidently not heard any sound of steps, for she remained unmoved in the same attitude of hopeless dejection, then looking up with a start, as if the knowledge of another's presence had suddenly come to her, her eyes met Alfred's, and the pale weary face became suffused with a deep red colour.

'Mil—Miss Lindsay,' he exclaimed, taking both her hands and making a strong effort to

regain the mastery over himself: 'I—I have longed to see you, yet I would not have come without permission. I was going to the house to enquire for you, but memory drew me like a loadstone to this spot. I could not return to London after—I mean—I don't know what I mean.'

It was of no use, he could not go on, and letting go her hands he turned away, whilst Mildred sank back into the chair, the quick delight that, even in the hour of deepest sorrow, had welled up in her heart when first she raised her head and saw him standing before her, revealed how wholly she loved him, and what a fearful blank the world would be to her, now that the dear object of their mutual affection was gone, and, with him, all excuse for those long daily visits, which, perhaps unknown to her, had been a

source of strength and cheerfulness during the weeks that had preceded her brother's death.

'As your oldest English friends—we may call ourselves so may we not?' he said, trying to guard against his own weakness by at once referring to his wife; 'will you not give us the privilege of taking you away from these sad scenes for a little time? Maud hoped you would have come to us at once.'

'I could not, and I cannot,' she answered softly. 'Had I accepted any invitation it would have been yours—that of my oldest, best friends indeed, but I am not yet fit to be with others, and my true home is where he . . . He wished me to invite our old governess at Rennes—an English lady to be my companion—I have done so.'

'But a stranger here, here where we used

to be so happy in spite of all—Mildred, how can you bear the thought of it?'

She seemed not to notice that he called her by her Christian name, nor did he know he had done so, the 'giant from whom the bravest can only turn away—so gentle is he, so beautiful in his irresistible might,' was overpowering him, and he rose from the seat he had taken beside her.

'What else have I to do in the world now but to fulfil his wishes? As I may not remain alone, what does it signify who comes to live with me?'

'I suppose I had better go,' he said abruptly, 'I must not trespass any longer upon your grief. Will you walk with me to the end of the shrubbery?'

She stood up in silence not venturing to ask him to remain, and avoiding to meet his

wistful gaze. Perhaps he was hurt at her apparent passiveness and indifference, for he added with formal politeness:

'Thank you for your readiness to comply with my request, but it was selfish of me to make it. I see I can be of no use or comfort to you; let me then say good-bye here'—he paused—'it may be for ever.'

'For ever,' she exclaimed, whilst a fit of trembling seized her, and she caught at the table for support.

But that glance had betrayed the secret hitherto so successfully guarded, and Alfred's arms were already round her with a strong firm clasp. Once before she had been folded in his embrace, but then in unconsciousness, now in consciousness, and for one short moment, she tasted of the ineffable happiness that would have been her's could she only

have rested there in peace, untortured by the sense of wrong-doing. There are a few chosen favoured ones to whom it is given to know the full delight of Alexandrine de la Ferronnaye's beautiful expression of greatest earthly felicity, 's'aimer, s'aimer et oser parler de Dieu'! even the shortest spell of such is surely worth the price so often paid for it, a whole life-time of after suffering; but alas for poor Mildred she was not one of those happy few; this greatest human bliss God had seen fit to deny her.

'You love me, Mildred! then save me from myself, from the wretched selfishness, and worse, into which I am falling deeper and deeper when out of the reach of your influence. You have the power to raise me to something better than I have ever been, or to make my fall greater than it would have

been had I never known you, say, which shall it be?'

'Oh! stop!' she cried, disengaging herself hastily. 'You forget what is due to yourself and to me! it is madness ——'

'Yes, madness!' he interrupted passionately, 'madness against which I have fought for more than a year. You were like an angel shedding light and heat over my cold dreary hearth, till that April morning at Chiltern Park when the letter, which brought such joy to you, filled me with despair and revealed to me my own madness. Then you were happy and I could conceal it . . . Later, God alone knows the happiness of that moment when, having rescued your brother, I felt the waves carrying me out to sea! I fancied I had purchased a great joy for you at the cost of my life, that hence-

forth I should live in your heart without ever having caused you an hour's sorrow; but it was not to be. I resolved to avoid you, to go so far away that we should become as strangers to each other. Again fate interposed, my friend became ill, I could not desert him whilst it was possible to please or cheer him . . . Afterwards, the thought of your sorrow and loneliness haunted me. I could no longer take away with me the comfort of feeling that at least you were happy in home ties; nevertheless, I had almost said farewell for ever when it flashed on me that for you also my sacrifice came too late. Mildred, do not tell me to go now; have pity on us both!'

'It is for you to have pity;' she said in a low tone, feeling instinctively that to appeal to his generosity was her—their best

safeguard,—'to leave me, to spare me any further suffering; now, indeed, we must say good-bye for ever.'

'Then you do *not* love me, Milly?'

At the sound of that word there rushed back to her mind a host of memories—sweet records of the happy hours they had spent together with him who had been to them like a central point in which their affections had a right to meet, and the choking pain in her throat rose higher and higher. How could she answer that question asked in a sad beseeching voice from which the previous elation and excitement had passed away? Had she the strength to deny with any show of firmness the truth which he had read in—those seldom-failing truth tellers—her eyes? The question was repeated still more softly and humbly; she dared not hesitate any longer.

'Yes, as the dearest of friends whom to part from is like—like losing a second brother; yet it must be so, you must not come again.'

'Yes, once again,' he said quietly, a sort of hopeless calm succeeding the first burst of passion. 'I will go to Ireland for a few days to make the final arrangements with Waters as to where we shall meet, and to see, perhaps for the last time, my early home and humble friends at Maurpton Castle; then I will come to say good-bye to you. I will not remain more than a few minutes and you will not need the presence of a stranger. I was certain I had read in your face the same undying feeling that has mastered me, and thought that the consciousness of being my good genius would have given you some degree of happiness. But since you have

told me that I deceived myself, you surely need not fear that I shall offend—that I shall urge you to make any sacrifice for my sake; only let me come once before I go for ever, that I may wish you farewell calmly . . . my madness shall be under proper restraint by that time,' he added with a poor attempt at a smile; 'on this day week then as—as "a second brother," you will not refuse to see me for a moment—Milly?'

'No,' she murmured, still shading her eyes with one hand and letting the other fall into his.

He raised it to his lips and was gone!

CHAPTER VII.

Quand nous rentrons du combat des passions mutilés et sanglants, mais victorieux, nous pouvons pleurer devant Dieu ce qu'il nous en a coûté.—LACORDAIRE.

MILDRED sat there motionless, well-nigh overwhelmed by the sense of utter desolation that fell upon her as the sound of Alfred's footsteps grew fainter and fainter.

'Oh, that he would come back!' was the yearning that filled her whole being, but to which her will consented not. Some envious fallen angel whispered there was yet time to recall him, and, fearing to listen to that whisper, she rose hastily and returned to the house.

The servants received a general order that no one was to be admitted except Lady Maud Meredith, but Lady Maud was the only one of Mildred's acquaintance who did not call during that first week after the funeral. The days passed outwardly in weary and unbroken monotony, yet all too quickly, since every hour brought nearer the time when she had promised to receive Alfred's farewell visit.

To break that promise would be to wound him too deeply by a seeming want of trust; and for the same reason, she dared not hasten the arrival of her companion. The promise must be kept in the sense in which he had understood it; she must see him again for one short moment without the restraint of another's presence. And in the silence of the darkened rooms, in the lulling

murmur of the quickly flowing river, in the rustling of the summer wind through the trees, in all places and at all times, some phantom echo seemed to catch up his words: 'Then you do not love me, Milly?'

Not love him! Why her love for him was the absorbing feeling of her whole being; it had caused her to withhold her consent to that which, even at the time she vaguely felt to be her darling brother's most ardent, *dying* wish—that she should become Lord Waters' wife. Not love him! Why it was the consciousness that, humanly speaking, she could, indeed, be his good genius, and at the cost of the sacrifice of herself that rendered the temptation so fearfully strong. The only real manifestation of love is the holocaust of self, and to refuse this proof to him for whom she would gladly have laid

down her life, was the pang of pangs. Every earthly tie that might have even helped her to make the greater and higher sacrifice demanded was broken.

There were no loved ones remaining whose hearts would be wrung by her weakness; she herself would be the only sufferer, and in a cause so dear! Could she seem to mock him by bidding him seek consolation in his own home, from his proud self-righteous wife—the destroyer of his happiness, the real source of all his faults and wanderings? Must he be left to drift away to evil and misery, when for the present, at least, he could be rendered happy by her whom he loved, and who loved him so entirely?

All the most generous instincts of her woman's nature were drawing her towards him, fighting against her sense of duty, when,

on Sunday evening, wearied by that fierce combat, she entered the room which had been her brother's, hoping to find rest there —there where everything seemed to speak to her of the dead, surely no alien thought would dare to intrude on her sorrow. According to her desire nothing in the room had been altered, it looked as if arranged for the return of its owner; even the book from which he had last read—The Following of Christ—was still upon the table beside the bed; yet even here, after a little time, the remorseless tempter pursued her. With her lips she had already denied her love, two days hence would she have strength to repeat that denial?

She leaned against the framework of the open window whilst the evening breeze, laden with the scent of flowers, fanned her

burning cheek, and on her ear stole the sound of music mingled with that of softly splashing water, as if some songster were singing to his 'ladye faire,' as their boat glided down the river. Mildred turned away feeling unable to sustain the conflict, and longing only to be taken to the home of her heart for evermore; but as she moved from the window her attention was caught by a photograph hanging upon the opposite wall, which Alfred had given to her brother about a fortnight before, and a sudden palor chased the deep flush from her cheeks.

The photograph represented Alfred standing under the shade of a large tree, looking down somewhat sternly, and Eddy with his arms clasped round the neck of the great Newfoundland dog, peering into his father's face with an expression of perfect trustful-

ness. They had stood thus on the day of their first visit to the villa, when the child was begging for a row on the Thames and Alfred would have refused, fearing it might not be good for his friend, until Charles himself came to the rescue and decided in Eddy's favour; he declared afterwards that he had seldom seen a prettier picture of confiding affection. Therefore Alfred, who was always devising little pleasures for the invalid, had the group photographed as nearly as possible in the same position.

Mildred stood still for a few minutes gazing upon the upturned, trustful little face, then eagerly approached the table near the bed, and opening the book which lay there, she knelt down and wrote with trembling fingers a couple of lines beneath her brother's name. As she laid aside the pen and

pressed her lips as a seal upon the paper, a paroxysm of weeping mastered her, and long afterwards Jeannette found her still kneeling there before that open book.

CHAPTER VIII.

And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns.—MOORE.

MEANWHILE Alfred was in Ireland, and learning unfortunately to understand Mildred better than when they had parted. Maud was not at home when he returned from Richmond on the day of the funeral, and having begged Mdlle. Dubourg to tell his wife that he was going to Maurpton Castle, he set off without waiting to see her.

On the following evening as Lord Waters sat alone after dinner, looking absently at the view before him, the door was unexpectedly opened and the servant announced Captain Meredith.

'This is a pleasant surprise for me!' exclaimed Lord Waters. 'It was a kind thought to come now and share my solitude when I am in the midst of tiresome preparations for departure. Casey, tell the cook to send up dinner for Captain Meredith.'

'No, I have dined,' interposed Alfred, sitting down with his back to the light and leaning his elbows on the table.

'Poor Lindsay!' said Lord Waters as the servant retired; 'tell me of—of them.'

'You know that the funeral only took place yesterday. I could not stay in town after it, and came off here to escape, if possible, from my own thoughts.'

'And Miss Lindsay, how does she bear it? Have you seen her?'

'Yes, I have seen her.'

'Well.'

Alfred started, the impatient tone of that one word indicated more than ordinary interest. Suddenly there recurred to his mind a certain conversation with Lady Chievers which had rather puzzled him at the time, now its meaning appeared plain enough; Lord Waters loved Mildred Lindsay!

'Well,' repeated Alfred, struggling to repress the jealous pain caused by this thought, 'I do not know what there is to tell in such a case. Of course it was a terribly sad business, he was everything to her. Grief seldom kills, however, and does a woman ever feel strongly about anything or anybody? I do believe though, Waters, that *you* are caught at last, no doubt you will be an excellent consoler!'

'Would that I could!' muttered Lord

Waters under his breath, but Alfred heard or guessed the import of those barely spoken words.

'Ha! I was right . . . Let me drink to the future Lady Waters!' He poured out a glass of wine and drank it off hastily. 'You will tell me when I may congratulate Miss Lindsay!'

'What nonsense you are talking Meredith, I tell you she has thrown her heart away on some fellow who is not worthy of her, or she would not be indifferent to such a prize.'

'How do you know? what do you mean?'

Lord Waters had left town shortly after Mildred's rejection, not so abruptly, however, as to excite any suspicion even in the mind of Lady Chievers, who had evidently been willing to welcome Mildred as her cousin. Never by word or sign had he

betrayed to anyone the wound he had received until that evening, when Alfred's unexpected arrival direct from her brother's funeral, and almost from her presence, so unnerved him that reserve gave way. It was a relief to speak unrestrainedly of her after the weeks of self-imposed silence and solitary brooding over his disappointment, and his trust in Alfred's silence in regard to anything confided to him was unbounded.

'I mean this—that she allowed me at least to infer that her heart was pre-engaged. To all my prayers, sanctioned by her brother's warmest approbation, her answer was—how well I remember it!—"I cannot let you hope for that which I have not to give, but if it can be any satisfaction to you, you may rest assured that I shall never marry." There was but one inference to be drawn from such

an avowal. She loves some one who is blind to the happiness that he might possess. You were constantly with them, Meredith, have you any idea who it can be?'

'I? I did not know anything of all this,' exclaimed Alfred eagerly.

'No, I knew they were both too generous to speak of it even to you, and you are the only one in the world to whom I could have so spoken. I think I shall be better for having talked freely to you about it for once, then let the subject be buried for ever. Loving her as I do, you can fancy what it is to me to feel that she is sad and desolate, left without one to cherish and protect her! I can never forget her look and the tone of her voice when she answered as I have told you; they impressed me with a double sense of hopelessness for her, and for myself—yes,

I love her well enough to feel that I could bear anything better than to see her the victim of an unrequited attachment.'

'How can we tell that it is unrequited? might it not be only unfortunately placed—placed upon some one separated from her by circumstances?'

'But what circumstance save the absence of a corresponding affection, do you suppose, would effectually separate her from any one whom she loved? Want of position, want of fortune, want of anything that the world esteems? There was a time, as you know, when I should have condemned that as romantic and exaggerated. Since then I have learned to think there is little worth having which is not called exaggerated. I believe that she would hesitate at no sacrifice for one dear to her.'

'You are right,' muttered Alfred, not daring to make the suggestion trembling upon his lips. 'How, then, if the object of her affection were bound in the chains of an ill-assorted marriage?'

'I know I am, and it seems incredible that she should love in vain; it would be a consolation to me to know before I leave England that there might be happiness in store for her after time had dulled the pain of her brother's loss. As you were so very intimate with them, I hoped you might be able to give me some satisfaction on the subject.'

'I? they never spoke to me.'

'Of course not, and if they had you could not repeat anything confided to you. What I meant was, that you might have guessed from your own observation if the cause of her unhappiness was likely to be removed,

but I see that you will not, or cannot speak of what concerns her welfare.'

'Heaven knows I cannot,' replied Alfred, then added as if to explain the strange emphasis of his answer, 'I know nothing.'

'Then shall we go out? the open air and a cigar will be pleasanter than this heated room.' Lord Waters was evidently a little hurt at his brother-in-law's reserve.

Alfred gladly assented; the effort to converse or answer questions was too much for him, when all that he had just heard was creating a wild tumult in his heart. Had not Mildred's eyes rather than her lips told the truth during their last interview? Even at the moment of her brother's death had not *his* coming brought back light and hope to her countenance, as instinctively she turned to him for help in her sorrow?

A great yearning seized him to return at once, but he had at least implied a promise not to ask to see her again for a week. As he was certain that she would be true to her promise, so he felt that he ought not to break faith with her; and in spite of his ever-increasing impatience to find himself once more in her presence, he remained at Maurpton Castle till Sunday, but to the original object of his visit—to arrange a place of meeting on the Continent with Lord Waters—he never once alluded.

CHAPTER IX.

That strain again—it had a dying fall :
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour.—SHAKESPEARE.

ON the second day after his arrival in Ireland, Alfred received a letter from Maud to say that Eddy had the measles, and, without directly asking her husband to come back, she still wrote in an injured tone, seeming to draw a comparison between Alfred's absence, pleasure-seeking, and his cousin Joseph Bertram's attention to herself and the ailing child. The letter only served to embitter him; he would not be censured into returning home, and replied by a few

lines of enquiry for Eddy without referring to his own movements. No reply came by return of post, so he concluded that all was going on well; therefore, according to his first intention, he started for Dublin on Sunday afternoon, but meeting an acquaintance in the train who was going to Kingstown, he consented to accompany him instead of going to his usual hotel in Dublin, by which means he missed a telegram which came to Maurpton Castle shortly after he had left, and which Lord Waters forwarded to the Gresham.

By Monday evening's mail Alfred left Kingstown, and on reaching London next morning, drove direct to his Club, where he rested until about ten o'clock, and then went down to Richmond. In a few minutes more he expected to see her in whom were

realised the fair dreams of his early youth about woman, who had the power to make him forget all care and pain, and who he now believed loved him even as ardently as he loved her. He little knew how much better she loved him!

Her name—'Miss Lindsay?'—was all he said when the door was opened, and something in the expression of the man's face sent a chill through him.

'Miss Lindsay was obliged to go to France suddenly yesterday evening, Sir,' replied the servant; 'Father Herbert sent over a note for you early this morning, shall I fetch it for you Sir? or will you step into the study?'

'No, please to bring it to me.'

With all the composure he could assume Alfred put the letter into his pocket and turned away from the villa with a bitter feel-

ing of disappointment. Mildred was then like the greater number of women, she could make promises which she did not mean to fulfil, and was incapable of perfect trustfulness. Did she fancy that he would intrude on her against her will, since she thought it necessary to run away from him? Then she could never have known what real love was, or she would have understood how impossible it would be for him ever to enter her presence against her desire.

For a considerable time he walked on neither knowing nor caring whither he went.

It was an additional mortification to be referred to another for any explanation of her conduct, surely she might have written to him herself. At length, however, he reflected that possibly there might have been some imperative cause, unconnected with him, for this

sudden journey, and opening the envelope he found enclosed a sealed letter accompanied by a few lines from Father Herbert to say that Miss Lindsay had left it in his care, fearing to entrust it to a servant in the confusion of yesterday's hurried departure, as she was particularly anxious that Captain Meredith should receive her note without fail on calling at the villa. With eager haste Alfred turned to the precious enclosure.

'Forgive me, I could not stay to receive your farewell visit, God knows how fully I meant to keep that promise. Do not misunderstand me, it was through no want of trust in you, it is from my own weakness I have fled. I knew not—no doubt because I had not willed to know—what my real feelings towards you were, until I discovered that not even to give peace and joy to my dying brother would

I promise to become the wife of one whom I could not have failed to like had my affections been free. The knowledge came too late for prevention, so I could only hide and try to crush those unauthorised feelings. Almost in the very home that death had robbed me of my best safe-guard, I had the anguish of learning that you also had allowed the fatal disease to master you, and the momentary strength which then enabled me to dissemble the truth deserted me as the day approached when we were to meet again. Yesterday evening I stood alone in the room of him whom I had so fondly cherished, yet even there, where every object seemed to speak to me of his beautiful life and death, louder than all rose the cry of my aching heart, repeating your words that I could be your good genius—that I could make you happy.

To me, no price seemed too great to pay for such a power, and at last I felt that I could not refuse you the great proof of love, sacrifice—that when we met on Tuesday I could not tell you again to go. All sense of duty was conquered, I had ceased to resist when by a seeming chance my eyes fell upon that picture of you and Eddy, in which, notwithstanding your refusal to gratify him, he stood looking up at you undismayed as if he could not believe in disappointment or pain coming to him through you! It seemed as if a little angel messenger had been sent to save us both! The thought flashed upon me that a day might come when, in loyalty to his mother, and through my fault, he would shrink from the sound of his father's name in sorrow and anger. I felt that, instead of becoming your good genius, I should have been a curse to

you, dividing you from your children, debarring you from their affection—from that happiness which ought to be yours in part here below, to be perfected hereafter. I go then in order not to be a curse to you and in the name of that love through which I would have sacrificed myself—everything save your real welfare, for the delight of cheering and brightening your life. I ask only for one joy which you alone can learn to give me some day that you have made happiness for yourself in your own home. It was the blessing that begged of God in the bitter hour when I resolved never again to look upon the face that was to me as the light of life.

'I hardly know what I have written, and I have not courage to read these blurred pages, yet I linger over them; it is so hard to say good-bye for ever, and still it must be said. ...

You once loved Lady Maud, or at least the Lady Maud of your imagination; surely, had you tried to make her all that you believed her to be, you could not have failed to succeed. Even now—Oh! let me hope that it is not too late, that in time to come you will be grateful to me for having broken my promise, and listened to the silent pleading of your little Eddy's pictured face, that pain and disappointment might not reach him through you, for having obeyed the divine command, and chosen the thorny path of duty! Then even in abiding sorrow and loneliness, I shall be happy in your happiness. Alfred, give me my reward!'

Thus at the same moment he learned that she loved him and was lost to him. The pang of that separation was too great; he swore he would not bear it, and merely for

the sake of the cold, proud being who bore his name. Mildred had said that for herself no price on earth seemed too great to pay for the joy of rendering him happy, and it was for his sake, for his welfare, rather than debar him from the affections of his home circle, that she had gone away a lonely wanderer to foreign lands. It must not be; he would follow wherever she had gone, and teach her that her love was more to him than that of all the world.

CHAPTER X.

In this way poor women, whose power lies solely in their influence, make themselves like music out of tune and only move men to run away.—GEORGE ELIOT.

LADY MAUD knew that he had intended to go abroad and had only deferred carrying out his intention on account of Charles Lindsay's illness, so there would be nothing strange in his leaving England at once. Accordingly he went home to make some preparation for his journey, but the news which awaited him there crushed the rebellious spirit within him.

Eddy had been attacked by croup on the previous Sunday evening, and the sight of

the fair childish form from which life had departed only a couple of hours before his father's return, was to him like the placing of a solemn seal upon Mildred's letter. Yes, a little angel messenger had been sent to save them both.

Maud was distracted with grief, and although her only greetings to Alfred were bitter reproaches, he spoke no word in his defence against the charge of heartlessness and indifference, save to declare he had never received the telegram: and bore in silence all his own suffering—suffering greater than anyone could ever guess. Feeling, for the first time for many a year, that his wife had a real claim upon his sympathy and indulgence, he gave them with no unsparing hand, and had she been willing to learn from sorrow the great lessons

which it is so often sent to teach—lessons of humility and unselfishness—there might have begun for them a new life of harmony and union. But, on the contrary, in her grief there was the old spirit of exaction, the insatiable craving for attention, fancying that no one suffered as she suffered; least of all her husband, upon whom she chose to think nothing ever made a deep impression.

Never in his life had Alfred needed distraction so much as then, yet evening after evening he spent with Maud, in order that she might not feel lonely. She accepted this attention as a right, and never tried to thank him for it by any effort to rouse herself from her silent depression; only when Joseph Bertram came—which he seldom failed to do, if only for an hour—did she attempt to converse, and in her manner to him there

was something which seemed to say: '*You* can understand me!'

At first her husband excused it all; he remembered that Joseph, and not he, had watched with her over the last hours of their lost child; therefore, it appeared only natural that she should find a sort of melancholy solace in the society of one so associated with the recollection of her bereavement. As time went on, however, he began to think that it was needless for him to remain at home if he had no power to cheer her, and if only Joseph's coming could draw her out of her mournful silence.

'I am going to the Club for an hour, Maud,' he said one evening, some three weeks after his return from Ireland; 'it is about the time of Joseph's usual visit, so you will not be dull while I am away.'

'*He* is kind and thoughtful whether one is in joy or sorrow,' answered Maud quickly. 'Your late dear friend's sister, Mildred Lindsay, you seem to have forgotten, I never hear you speak of her now. I believe it is the wisest plan to avoid all painful associations. You know, of course, that she has gone abroad.'

'Yes.' Alfred could not utter another word. He, accused of forgetting Mildred!

'As you never named her I have always forgotten to tell you I had a note from her on the eve of your return, to apologise for going away without taking leave of any of her friends. I only just saw that much and threw the note into my writing-case. I had no heart to read words of form then.'

'And since?'

'I have not looked at it.'

'I should like to hear what she says.'

Maud rang, and sent for her writing-case, then read listlessly the following lines :—

'Dear Lady Maud,—

'I undertook a task beyond my strength in trying to remain here in England, and as I feel that change of scene is absolutely necessary for me, I start for Paris to-morrow and thence perhaps I shall go to Italy; I know not where. Forgive the weakness which renders me unequal to taking leave of you and the dear children in person. A thousand loves to Eddy—Maud's voice trembled, but she continued after a moment's pause—tell him that his friend Milly will never forget him, even though she should not see him until her "goldy hair' has grown grey. Adieu, thēn, dear Lady Maud. I do not offer

to write for I shall have no fixed residence; and I do not ask you to remember me to Captain Meredith. I know he will not forget the sister of his friend to save whose life he once risked his own.

'MILDRED LINDSAY.'

'An odd adieu, yet very like her,' said Maud, endeavouring to speak unconcernedly, but the allusion to Eddy had taxed her composure to the utmost, and half-resentfully she tore up the note.

Alfred put out his hand with a hasty movement, then drew it back as he said, 'Thank you,' and left the room.

The next day he proposed that they should go to Chiltern Park, the season was almost over, besides as Maud joined in none of the gaieties, it seemed a pity to be shut up in

town during those long hot days; but her ladyship fancied to remain there some time longer, and, as usual, carried her point. For once Alfred gave up even his personal liberty to her caprice, and remained with her, but his patience was getting exhausted, Maud herself was breaking down the renewed sway that their mutual grief had given her over him, and before the autumn was over he went off to his favourite place of refuge, Maurpton Castle, which, when Lord Waters found that his brother-in-law had decided not to go abroad, he begged him to visit from time to time.

CHAPTER XI.

Infinite day excludes the night
And pleasures banish pain.—DR. WATTS.

A celebrated French writer has said: 'Il y a peu d'âmes qui soient organisées assez vigoureusement pour se maintenir dans le calme d'une forte résolution; toutes les consciences honnêtes sont capables de la générrosité d'un jour, mais presque toutes succombent le lendemain à l'effort du sacrifice.' And surely this is true if we have only our own strength to depend upon, if we have not even the natural support of affection and sympathy from those whose lives are inseparably bound up with our own.

Alfred had made the fullest sacrifice of the

happiness which he believed to have been within his grasp, but his resolution to endeavour to create a more real union between himself and his wife broke down, as day after day his generous efforts failed to obtain any response from her, and the memory of Mildred so pursued him that he was fain to court forgetfulness in any shape or form.

By degrees his appearance lost much of the genial freshness which had formerly caused him to look so many years his cousin's junior, and which Joseph had resented as a mark of the difference between a lot so favoured by fortune, and his own life of mental toil, which furrowed his brow in proportion as he obtained fame and wealth; but *his* time of enjoyment and repose had now come, whilst his envied rival was evidently nearing the goal of satiety.

With the people about Maurpton Castle, where Alfred spent nearly the whole winter, he was still their idol, and also the most popular man among his own class on the hunting-field or in society. Only Micky, who saw more of him than any one else when neither sport nor revel claimed his leisure, suspected that all was not well, and he said one day, gravely shaking his head: 'The Captian does be hearty, an' no mistake, but I wouldn't say it wasn't all to drown care. For sure and sartin he is not the same light-hearted gintleman he was two year ago, whin Mr. Lindsay—God rest his sowl—was here. Aither his death or somethin' else has given the Captain's heart a twist that it'll not rekiver in a hurry.'

Meanwhile Maud, caught by Dr. Bertram's specious theories of liberty, turned to the

excitement of politics as a refuge from the only grief that had ever really touched her—the loss of her son. When the season began in London, her house became a little centre of attraction for the liberal party, whom even radicalism does not render more insensible than the rest of the world to the influence of position, wealth, and beauty; and Maud's beauty was more imposing at thirty than it had been at twenty. Her vanity and craving for attention received abundant food, yet still she felt the mortification of her husband's open neglect, especially after a friend had been kind enough to repeat to her a remark made by him at a gay supper, when some one toasted Madame Roland as a patriotic heroine, 'Bah! a woman is as much out of her sphere when she enters the arena of political strife, as a priest; to the

one was given the ministry of human, to the other that of divine love, and my admiration and reverence for both cease when they descend into mere worldly warfare.'

When the season closed, therefore, the idea of returning to the country with so unsympathetic a companion, and with none to admire and do her homage as the priestess of intellect, became insupportable; even her health seem to decline at the prospect of such a fate. Change of air and scene were at once prescribed, and Dr. Bertram's account of winter in Venice pleased her so much that she became convinced it was exactly the climate desirable for her. Alfred made no objection to the plan, but declared his own intention of remaining at home; his readiness to allow her to go so far away without him hurt her self-love more than she liked to

acknowledge, yet she would not humble herself so far as to abandon her project, or ask him to accompany her, as a favour and not as a right.

Her daughters were sent to a convent and their governess Mademoiselle Dubourg went abroad with her ladyship. They made a stay of a few weeks at Bellasilio, a villa on the banks of the Lago Maggiore, in order to allow the great heat to pass before going on to their destination for the winter.

The château of Bellasilio was built upon an eminence, and surrounded by gardens, which on the side facing the lake, descended far down the steep declivity of the hill in winding and shady terraces, formed, however,—unlike the stiff arcades of Isola Bella,—rather by nature than art, and terminated by a little pine wood, through which a path led to the

shore. From the uppermost terrace the view was of great extent and beauty; immediately beneath lay the expanse of deep blue water, and the Borromean Islands studded with trees and houses, while on the opposite shore lofty hills and countless villages intersected by plain and meadow, vineyard and forest, bordered the graceful curve of the lake as it swept away towards the north, and was lost to sight amid the snowy Alps.

The neighbourhood thus afforded the loveliest excursions, and with these, diversified by trips to Milan, Maud managed to while away some three weeks without finding the retirement unbearable. One evening, as the last echoed notes of the Ave Maria, chanted in turns by the peasants in the distant villages, faded away into the stillness of the coming night, the melody was caught up by the

rowers of a little boat, which seemed to rest upon the surface of the deep unruffled water beneath the terrace like a child rocked to sleep in its mother's arms. Maud stood leaning over the parapet listlessly wondering why the boat remained so long in the same place, but the songsters having sung one verse of the hymn suddenly ceased, then, as if borne by some gentle zephyr from over mountain and sea, the sweet tones of '*Qui sola virgin rosa*' fell softly upon her ear.

Was it only some chivalrous Italian wishing to serenade her with one of her own national melodies, or had the time come back when Alfred would follow her from one end of the world to the other? Her heart beat with an unwonted emotion as this gleam from 'the light of other days' seemed to penetrate through the deepening shades of

the balmy Italian night; only for an instant, however, did that gleam beguile the wandering fancy. She felt with a new pang that the light which gave it birth was gone for ever, but she asked not of herself what sinister influence had quenched it.

The boat approached the landing place of the village, whilst Maud, accompanied by Madlle. Dubourg, strolled along the terraces, unable to divest herself of a feeling of vague expectation. Little more than a quarter-of-an-hour elapsed when she descried the gatekeeper coming towards her followed by two gentlemen.

'Say that our coming is a glad surprise, fair cousin,' said Dr. Bertram, advancing with outstretched hand, 'or I shall be forced to think that my young friend here—allow me to introduce Lord Dacre, Lady Maud

Meredith—was right when he tried to persuade me that it was too late an hour even in Italy to break in on you without any previous announcement of our arrival. I trusted, however, to prepare and propitiate you with your own great bard's plaintive song, have I succeeded?'

'You would have succeeded had any preparation been needed,' replied Maud; 'your coming is indeed a glad surprise for which I am most grateful; had I the pleasure of knowing Lord Dacre more intimately, he should not escape a scolding for having wished to deprive me of my serenade, and the enjoyment of a little mystery; your visit to-morrow in the full glare of day would have been in comparison a dull commonplace affair.'

'Strike, but hear me!' said Lord Dacre,

smiling; 'I did not endeavour to dissuade *Dr. Bertram* from coming, I only urged that for a first visit it might seem intrusive on my part, and therefore begged him to let me remain at the hotel, but he would not listen to my remonstrances.'

'Because they did not seem worthy of attention, for I did not intend to trespass on her ladyship's hospitality even for a night's shelter,' interposed Joseph, 'and I have always thought that the best way to begin an acquaintance is at once to banish formality. We have very fair rooms at the little inn of Isola Bella, and the sail back by moonlight will be a fitting close for such an evening.'

Maud had been debating in her own mind whether she could ask them to stay at Bellasilio—she never forgot to consider what the

world's judgment would be in such cases—when Joseph thus removed the difficulty, and there was a special graciousness in her smile as she turned to him, he always seemed to her to do and to say the right thing.

'That did not show much faith in the cordiality of my welcome,' she answered, 'however, I will not send you away supperless, although you must confess that you deserve some such penalty for your distrust.'

The choicest fruit and most sparkling wines at her command were set forth to do her guests honour; and midnight had already chimed before the visitors thought of returning to their island quarters. In Paris Dr. Bertram had by chance met young Lord Dacre, the eldest son of his friend Lord Monkstown; when, discovering they were both bound for Italy, they agreed to make

the journey together. After that first evening on Lago Maggiore, Lord Dacre felt more delighted than ever at his good fortune in having fallen in with so experienced a fellow traveller, who never seemed to fail in finding attractive resting places.

Joseph did not tell Maud that it was circumstances connected with Italian affairs as well as the desire to be near her that had caused him to leave England so unexpectedly; he gave some plausible reasons which she accepted as a matter of course, only thinking how pleasant it was that her solitude should be thus interrupted just as it began to be a little wearisome. Some few days were spent in introducing Lord Dacre to the varied beauties of that lake country, and then one lovely morning in the early part of September they all started for Venice.

At the railway station of Milan, Venice presented herself in a most inviting manner in one of the magnificent frescoes which adorn the waiting room, and all along the road brightness, abundance, and beauty vied with each other to captivate her coming guests. *Verona—la degna; Mantova—la gloriosa;* and before them the Lago di Garda —which of itself seems to encompass all that visible beauty can realise—then *Vincenza—l'antica; Padova—la forte,* all stood their ground in the garlanded way to the beautiful Queen of the Adriatic; and after having passed through these scenes, the air laden with the perfume of nature, the fresh breeze of the sea suddenly came and gave them a sensation of delight unspeakable.

For some minutes they were carried along *upon* the water, as it seemed; then the boat-

men began to clamour around them, and Maud made her first trip in a gondola, declaring that it well deserved all that has been said in its praise; the absence of noise, dust, jolting, and many other ills common to locomotion in general, makes it indeed the 'crowning mercy.'

On the very night of their arrival they witnessed a magnificent fête—it was a serenade given in honour of a visitor, illustrious as a revolutionary hero. Some fifteen hundred gondolas, it was said, were assembled on the Grand Canal, all gaily lighted and decked out for the festival. In the midst of these there was a splendid orchestra built upon some large boats, and illuminated with groups of brilliant lamps hung in the form of palm trees over the heads of the performers, who were all in evening dress. Vain would be the en-

deavour to give an adequate idea of the taste and splendour of this brilliant temple as it floated along in more than imperial majesty, surrounded by myriads of lesser lights, waving in all grace to the gentle breeze.

They first saw this gorgeous procession from the gardens of the Hotel Barbesa, which open to the Grand Canal, and then they proceeded to the Piazza San Marco where all Venice seemed to be gathered in joyful ex pectation; afterwards they took to a gondola, where *dolce far niente* reached a climax almost extatic. The freshness of the evening breeze in that ardent climate, the utter forgetfulness of all concern about health, wealth, or wisdom; freedom perfect from the petty cares of life, the sufficiency of existence itself; the happy multitude whose sole thought was

pleasure; the waveless water which the soft air did not venture so much as to ripple; the constant and ever varying movements of the gondoliers; the blue and star-spangled sky graced by the bright crescent of the young moon; the choruses of some hundred voices supported by a full orchestra; fireworks; lights of all colours, sounds of all sweetness; all was there to fill the cup and make the nectar sparkling and exhilarating.

This scene was a vision of the past. All that they saw and heard was the accumulated treasure of ages gone, the tradition of past glories handed down from generation to generation! The Italian people know the taste of *all* the springs of life, and are not afraid to 'drink deep' when they raise an unforbidden and favoured cup to their lips. We have not their long and hardy experience,

nor have we yet learned the happy medium between unhallowed license and timid superstition; whilst *we* chafe in the leading strings of human opinions *they* live in the perfect freedom of divine Truth, and well do they illustrate the prophetic vision which tells us that God has 'anointed His own with the oil of gladness above their fellows.'

The charm was irresistible, and for the moment, overpowered even Maud's self-absorbed indifference, leading her to a nobler pride—pride in that bright spirit of joyousness which her religion has always produced in the races who have never bowed the knee to the darkening powers of error and division.

'You have never lived among the Irish peasantry, Joseph,' she said, 'or this keen delight would remind you of them. Neither suffering nor want even can deaden their

hearts to joy; in their direst trouble they will brighten up at a kind word and exclaim: "After all God is good!" And if they only get a chance of rejoicing they throw themselves into it with their whole heart, as if no lot on earth could be happier than theirs. We see the same feeling here. While this festival lasts the poorest Italian is as happy and free from care as—or rather far more so—than the prince whose coming it celebrates. Confess, in spite of your scepticism, that this is a fine effect of faith.'

'But is it the effect of faith? The Italians have fought their way to the exhilarating spring of "*liberté, égalité*," and they are inebriated with its strong waters. Of the Irish, what can I say? You remember your own poet's expression,

The sorrows of one moment forgotten in the levity of the next.

May I then venture to recall the fact that quickness and depth of feeling are not always united? I do not forget that your Ladyship is Irish—the exception proves the rule!'

'Dr. Bertram is surely right, in regard at least to the Irish,' said young Lord Dacre. 'As a people, they might be accused of levity; whilst in their daughters, beauty and steadfastness seem to meet. But I cannot think with him, that it is the new order of things here that calls forth the exuberant gaiety we see around us, as the Italians have always been proverbial for it; this careless happiness probably proceeds from the same trivial and indolent nature that renders them incapable of real greatness, which requires effort.'

'Nay, that is almost blasphemy uttered in sight of Santa Maria della Salute,' laughed Maud. 'You call a people trivial and incap-

able of real greatness, who, two centuries ago, erected so magnificent a temple in thanksgiving for the cessation of the plague!'

'And still a greater blasphemy uttered in sight of the Ducal Palace,' added Joseph; 'that stupendous record of the greatness of the people who gave birth to the immortal artists by whom it was planned and welcomed, and the statesmen and warriors who made its walls ring with the shouts of liberty, and obtained for their little commonwealth the title of "La gran repubblica." Is not their capacity for enjoyment, like their greatness, then, to be attributed to their love of freedom? You, above all, Lady Maud, can understand their exultation over the downfall of tyranny; the keener the intelligence the more fully it appreciates emancipation from moral bondage.'

Maud was too much flattered by the implied compliment to question the justice of Joseph's remarks, and refrained from taking any further part in the discussion which, however, Lord Dacre continued. All his tastes were in opposition to the revolutionary movement, but he was still too unripe a reasoner to contend with any success against Dr. Bertram, and Maud could not help feeling more than ever that it was no slight homage to her to be the chosen friend of a man who seemed to conquer all before him in the intellectual world.

Owing especially to Dr. Bertram's fame as no inefficient supporter of the cause of Italian unity, the best society in Venice was soon open to his fair cousin ; and the novelty, the gaiety of her new friends, their openly-expressed admiration of herself, Lord Dacre's

shy allegiance, and Joseph's unwearied devotion, all united to enhance the charm of that soft southern life with its freedom from conventionality and restraint. Maud had never before been so nearly satisfied, and Joseph fancied that now the fulness of his triumph over Alfred was almost achieved.

CHAPTER XII.

Where pleasure is the magic wand
That, wielded right,
Makes hours like minutes, hand in hand
Dance by fu' light.—BURNS.

AFTER Easter, which fell late that year, Lord Dacre's parents arrived in Venice on their way to the East, whither he was to accompany them. They had intended only to rest for a few days, yet so pleasant did Dr. Bertram succeed in making their stay in the 'fairy city,' that the days extended to weeks, and they were gradually drawn into the circle of those who seemed to acknowledge the reign of Lady Maud Meredith. In England, no

doubt, the Monkstowns would have censured her for leading so gay a life in her husband's absence, but in Venice she was 'the fashion,' and few are bold enough to raise their voice against the favourites of that capricious deity. In truth also Joseph had guarded her reputation very jealously, he had taken care never to give the voice of slander an opportunity to couple their names together in any sense injurious to her. She had been the one passion of his life mingled with that of revenge against him who had separated them in their early youth, and neither his love nor his desire of revenge would be satisfied unless he could take her from Alfred in heart and soul as well as in person. She must be uninfluenced by any idea of having been already compromised in the sight of the world; she must love him for his talent, his fame, his power to subject

others to his will; he would owe his conquest to nothing outside of himself.

Thus Maud's fair name remained stainless even during that season in Italy, and the incense of admiration surrounding her with a profuseness sufficient to have overpowered the wisdom of any woman less coldly prudent than herself. Nevertheless her pride of virtue did receive a shock on the occasion of a farewell *fête* given for the Monkstowns at her own palazza.

The dancing went on merrily in the long gallery which traversed the whole edifice terminated by a window and balcony over the Grand Canal; at the opposite end was a raised tribune for the orchestra. Those who preferred calmer or deeper enjoyment dispersed themselves through the many reception-rooms which all opened into the gallery. Among

the guests unexpectedly appeared an old acquaintance, Lord Moyston, who had been much out of England during late years; he had lost his wife soon after their marriage, and having an official appointment on the Continent he had become lost to sight if not to mind by many even of his former intimate acquaintances.

'Will you acknowledge an old—what shall I say, Lady Maud—friend?' he said, extending his hand as she turned round quickly at the sound of his name. 'I only arrived yesterday and heard by chance that you were here, that you received this evening. I did not know that the reception was more than an ordinary one, or I should not have come uninvited.'

'And so have denied me the pleasure of inviting you even at the eleventh hour. . . .

à bientôt, then,' answered Maud, turning to receive new comers, and dismissing him for the moment with that proud yet gracious ease of manner which she could assume so well, and which, flattering even whilst it commanded, had formed the delight and torment of the admirers of her maiden days.

Her first feeling on seeing Lord Moyston was gratification that even he—a rejected suitor, would not resist the desire to meet her again. Had that desire been only prompted by curiosity to note the ravages of time, the expression of his countenance had already ratified the tale repeated by many a mirror that night—that, as she stood there at the entrance to the magnificent marble hall, with innumerable lights flashing down upon her, and surrounded by many a pair of lustrous and languishing black eyes, set off with all the

bright animation of southern natures, her beauty was unrivalled. When they met later in the evening she allowed him to claim her attention as an old friend.

'But I must tear myself away,' he said, after they had been conversing for some time. 'I have a mass of papers to look over to-night, as I am obliged to start again to-morrow morning.'

'Then, if so pressed for time, why have taken Venice for your route? It certainly was not the most direct way to England.'

'I should like to say: You were in Venice; but, as I have already acknowledged, I was not aware of the fact until my arrival, the real reason for my detour I am not free to mention . . . Is it not strange that I should like to recall the days when we were intimate, Lady Maud? but at this moment I

cannot help thinking of the last time I stood beside you at a ball, I will not say how long ago, but it was on a certain New Year's eve, at Thor Abbey. How many changes have taken place since then! I am again alone in the world, and you are alone in Venice, but only altered like a summer's day when the promise of its morning has been surpassed by the brilliance of its noon. You can show the world that there is even a better cosmetique for the development of beauty, than that of the sybarite's wise indifference to the joys and sorrows of others—a love match and a devoted husband!'

The polished irony of his words stung Maud bitterly, but she was at least his equal in the use of such weapons, and with a mock-smile she answered—

'And now we are quits, I suppose, Lord

Moyston: you consider that your compliment of to-night has avenged your defeat of that New Year's eve?'

'My dear Lady Maud!'

'My dear Lord Moyston, you said you had a mass of papers to look over, and I know I have a large number of guests to attend to, therefore I fear we cannot spend any more time on pleasant recollections. I see there is a new dance about to be formed, so perhaps you will be kind enough to take me back to the gallery.'

'Your will is my law.'

'Indeed! since when?' she asked, laughing and accepting his arm.

At the entrance to the gallery they parted, and she mingled among her guests, but a feeling of weariness had come over her. The memory of that New Year's eve had

been too rudely awakened to slumber again. The allusion to her devoted husband could not have been unintended in its irony ; but that other allusion to the sybarite's cosmetique—had it also been pointed at her ?

On the side opposite to the reception-saloons was a small room also looking on the Grand Canal, and serving as a vestibule to the morning-room where she used to receive her intimate friends, and there she now went to snatch a few minutes' rest from the gay scene which had suddenly become so wearisome to her. The door of the antechamber had been left slightly ajar, and as she pushed it open Lord Dacre turned hastily round from the balcony where he had been standing in solitary contemplation of the beautiful night.

'What an ungallant cavalier!' exclaimed Lady Maud. 'Is it not an insult to all the

beauty yonder thus to steal away? Had you not been alone I should have understood the attraction of quiet and a moonlit scene, and have passed on unheeding; as it is, I feel it a duty to my fair guests to chide you. Did you not dance the last quadrille?'

'Surely your ladyship remembers that when I claimed your promise to give it to me, you were so engaged in your conversation with Lord Moyston that you begged me to defer our engagement to a later dance?'

'There was time however to find another to fill my place.'

'Time! Yes, but can time achieve the impossible?'

Lady Maud looked at him in vague surprise, and he added hurriedly—

'It is not so easy to be agreeable to a stranger when pursued by the dreary

thought of departure from the pleasantest place one has ever known.'

'Why go then?'

'My father came this way on purpose for me.'

'Still, you are your own master; leaving Venice, then, cannot be so very painful as you go voluntarily.'

It irritated Maud to hear anyone complain of a self-created grief at that moment, when the idea of real grievances, as she considered them, weighed so heavily upon her, and she spake in a half-impatient tone, utterly forgetting the flattering application her words might bear to Lord Dacre.

'You do not think that I ought to go?' he said eagerly; 'only say you wish me to remain, and no force on earth could drag me away. Lady Maud, you must have known

long since what was the great charm of Venice to me, though I did not dare to tell you; but now, oh! thank —'

'So the brain may be affected by a moon as well as a sunstroke, and I fear you have got one, my lord, by standing so long upon that balcony. You will, however, allow an *old* friend like me to prescribe a new remedy. Go, dance away the momentary delirium, but first let me wish you *bon voyage*, and many pleasant adventures on the shores of the far-famed Bosphorus. Good-bye! we are friends, are we not?'

She held out her hand which he barely touched as he bowed and turned away, but the angry light in his eyes told how deeply he resented her answer; he could better have borne indignation than that light supercilious manner, yet had he known how great

an effort it cost her to assume it, and to hide her réal mortification, he might have been somewhat consoled.

On the following afternoon when the Monkstowns came to bid her adieu, she smilingly received their excuses for not being accompanied by their son, who, they said, would doubtless find a moment later in the evening to call and thank her again for all her kindness and that of her cousin Dr. Bertram, as it was to them he owed so much of the enjoyment he had found in Venice. But Lord Dacre did not call!

CHAPTER XIII.

There he whose loveless wisdom never failed,
In self-adoring pride securely mail'd.

WORDSWORTH.

SHORTLY after the departure of Lord Dacre and his party, Dr. Bertram proposed a little *al fresco* feast on the Lido, in order to gratify a desire expressed by Mdlle. Dubourg to make a sketch of Venice by sunset; and, as he thoroughly understood the art, he undertook to choose the best site for her. After the repast, when the servants had retired to the gondole, Maud grew tired of watching the progress of the drawing, and said she would take a walk to the other side of the island, along the shore of the Adriatic.

'It must not be for long, then,' said Joseph, rising to accompany her, 'as Mademoiselle will not have much more than a quarter of an hour's sketching light, night follows day so quickly in these southern lands.'

'Well, we shall return in a quarter of an hour,' replied Maud, 'and if the fancy moves us we can all then take a longer walk by the sea.'

They walked on in silence until they reached the outer shore, then Maud stopped and leaned her disengaged hand upon a fragment of the celebrated *murazzi*.

'The solemn calm of this scene is almost palpable,' she said abruptly, as her eyes wandered over the boundless sea; 'we feel the freedom from turmoil and strife, yet we weary of such calm and go back to the world, however great a desert it may be to

us. This past winter has been very pleasant; I had nearly succeeded in living in the present without thinking of the past or the future, until Lord Moyston came and raised up memories of days when I expected life to be so different. Is it always so? Is disappointment and weariness the lot of every woman who is not crushed down by the necessity of working for her livelihood into something like a machine set in motion by the will of others?'

'It is only so, Maud, when women, upon whom birth and fortune and all nature's best gifts have been lavished, make shipwreck of their own lives by giving themselves to one who cannot satisfy and guide their intelligence as well as their heart; their lot is indeed hard to bear.'

He had never before spoken so directly or

so warmly of her marriage being a mistake, and her colour deepened; yet the homage to her intelligence and recognition of her sorrows were too sweet to be rejected, it was a consolation to know she was appreciated and understood by one true friend, and that friend a man of acknowledged talent. Lord Moyston had stung her with his sarcasm, Lord Dacres, although little more than a boy, had dared to imply that she knew herself to have been for months an object of passionate attraction to him, but Joseph as ever, wrought a healing balm for all her annoyance.

'Will you not come back to England also, Joseph?' she asked, without alluding to his former answer. 'I must be home by August, and if you promise to return quickly and suggest a pleasant set of people, I will take care to assemble them in time to meet you.

You must come, or I shall think you have grown unkind and uncousinly if you refuse to help me over the first few weeks of the old monotonous existence to which I must return, and which will seem more empty than ever after the greater fulness of life that I have known here.'

'And for which you were made! Your place is at the side of men whose names will live as champions of the great cause of human liberty and intellectual progress; your smile and your encouragement giving life to every thought and project, and you yourself the pride and joy—'

'Oh Joseph stop!' she cried, half alarmed by the fervour of his words, yet still too much flattered to read therein more than her vanity wished to read. 'What shall I have of all this at Chiltern Park, surrounded by sports-

men? It is cruel to spread out before me a world of delight which now can never be mine, it is too late. . . . Come, let us go back.'

'There is no "too late" for those who know how to will and how to love,' he exclaimed, gently detaining her by the hand which rested on his arm, 'and this is the hour for which I have lived and toiled for more than ten years, the hour in which I could lay at your feet a sovereignty indeed—no paltry one given by a social accident, but won for you by my own unaided powers of mind and will in order to show who was the more worthy of you, the gay officer who dazzled you with golden charms, or his poor disinherited cousin. Maud! which of us two has best merited your love?'

Maud tried to withdraw her hand but dared

not speak. Surely it was not possible that she had been deceived in him whom she had hitherto so relied on as her dearest friend, and whose admiration she had so proudly received. He could not intend to offend her? His words must only be the first lost moan of a strong heart which she had unconsciously attracted in the days of her freedom, and which in a moment of exultation betrayed its own well and long kept secret!

'Maud, what means this trembling silence?' he added, in a tone which sounded almost harsh in its thrilling earnestness. 'You know what I would say. Chiltern Park is no home for you, your heart is not there; come to one where the fulness of life shall indeed be yours! Have I not waited long enough for my reward, and do I not deserve that it should be fully and freely given? An eagle's

mate is not frightened at the difficulties of the ascent to her lord's eyrie, however insurmountable they may appear to birds of common kind; her pride and her love bear her triumphantly over every obstacle!'

Whilst he spoke she felt like one oppressed by some fearful dream, unable to move or cry out; but as he ceased, the spell seemed broken and she wrenched her hand away.

'Great heavens! how have I merited such an insult, that you should pretend to believe I had so fallen as to become, even in thought, the prey of an unhallowed passion? What right have I given you to presume that I loved you?'

'You ask what right? . . . Then you do *not* love me, Maud?' he interrupted fiercely, grasping her wrist whilst he gazed fixedly

into her face; but only pain and anger were to be read therein, there was not a trace of any gentler feeling. Maud shrank in absolute fear before the uncontrolled rage that flashed from his eyes, as for a moment he seemed to have lost all mastery over himself, but he regained it by a mighty effort, and bitter scorn took the place of all appearance of violence.

'You need not answer,' he said in a low hissing tone, as she tried to speak, 'I know all now. I see you for the first time despoiled of the flattering mask which my own imagination lent to you; as one who has made a wreck of her husband's life without the excuse of passion, but merely through pride and blind self-worship, and you talk of falling after that!'

'I will not stand here to listen to your

insults, if you do not let me go this instant I will call Mdlle. Dubourg.'

'Call her! she will only serve as witness to my answer to your reproaches, but until you have heard it you stir not from this spot. Naturally it is a matter of indifference to *me* whether the world knows or not what has passed between us; it is a question for *your* consideration. Will you hear me alone or in the presence of your companion?'

'You do not wish to cast an unmerited stain upon my good name, Joseph,' she pleaded, cowering again beneath his dark stern gaze; 'it would be a poor, mean revenge in a man—'

'Decidedly too poor for injuries like yours. You could take shelter in the cry of injustice and look upon yourself as a martyr of virtue;

I seek no such revenge. Shall I call Mdlle. Dubourg?'

'No,' murmured Maud, preferring any torture to that of feeling herself in the power of another woman, and vaguely conscious that had she been altogether blameless Joseph could never have so mistaken her.

'Then listen to me,' he said in a steady deliberate tone. 'I loved you before Alfred Meredith came from India, and you received my attentions with more than ordinary graciousness; he returned to occupy the position I had been allowed to look upon as mine, our uncle's heir and Lady Maud Leeson's favoured suitor—later, her husband. I hated him for this double usurpation, and swore to prove the mistake that Lady Maud had made in her choice, even in an ambitious point of view. I have done so—who out of England

knows his name? But to return to the time of your marriage: you gradually estranged your husband more and more, seeming to consider him incapable of appreciating you, and turned to me for sympathy and companionship; you seemed to rejoice in my success as your own, and accepted the devotion of my whole life. I naturally believed that you had learned your mistake, that your heart had at last been really awakened, and I only waited to claim you until I could give you more than Alfred Meredith had given you. Then you ask what right I had to suppose that you loved me, and take offence because I believed you to be something nobler than a heartless egotist, who would be content to take all and give nothing, and blight two lives—'

'Oh, spare me, Joseph! I knew not what harm I was doing.'

'Spare you! When did you ever spare me? No, no! you must drink to the dregs the cup that you have prepared for yourself. One word more then; my desire of revenge against Alfred is appeased. I could not wish him worse than to have obtained for the partner of his life one whose cold insensibility did not, as I fancied, proceed from a heart unsatisfied but from a heart filled with self-worship; and this justice I will render him, that I believe there never breathed a more loyal nature, no one ever heard him utter a murmur against the wife who made his home a purgatory to him. For you, my revenge will be in the consciousness that shall haunt you night and day, that you have been as a curse to two men: driving the one

to political extremes which in your eyes are crimes, and from which he has hitherto refrained in deference to your prejudices (henceforth the object of my life shall be to destroy in the person of its chief what you call your religion), and the other into the arms of a sweet true-hearted girl to whom he can give no name; yet remember my words wherever you go, Lady Maud, Mildred Lindsay is a nobler woman than the cold proud wife with her stainless reputation. Now I need detain you no longer.'

He released her wrist and offered his arm, but Maud sank down upon the fragment of rock beside her.

'It is not true what you say of Mildred Lindsay,' she exclaimed, still clinging to the idea that although Alfred might have had many a passing caprice he had never raised

up a real rival. 'Mildred went abroad at the time—the time when Eddy died, and has never been in England since.'

'Ha! so your Ladyship is still vulnerable on one point, and does not like to hear that the despised husband has found so lovely a consoler; but believe me, if there ever was such a thing as love between man and woman it existed between your husband and Mildred Lindsay. I will merely mention one fact from which you can draw your own conclusions. You know that Alfred arrived from Ireland by the early mail on the morning of Eddy's death, that he only reached his home at eight, and at half past ten I saw him coming out of Mildred's villa at Richmond: immediately after she disappears, without taking leave of anyone and no one hears any more of her! You can easily

ascertain from my servant or from your husband himself if what I have said is true. Pray take my arm and let us return, a longer absence might excite remark; see how jealously I guard for you that reputation, which, as part of yourself, you prize so dearly.'

Maud was too crushed to resist his will, even in a trifle, and passively took his arm.

'I will leave Venice to-morrow,' she said, with sudden energy, as they came in sight of Mdlle. Dubourg.

'So hasty a departure on your Ladyship's part after our romantic walk of this evening would probably attract observation; if you care to avoid it you will wait a little longer. Meanwhile, I shall receive a despatch to-morrow which will require my immediate departure for Naples. You remember what object I told you, you have given to my life!'

CHAPTER XIV.

What can life give us, if we sacrifice what is fairest in ourselves?—LORD LYTTON.

THE last gorgeous tints of a hot summer day's sun lingered over the Place of the ancient Cathedral of Avranches, and seemed to transform into gold the iron chains which encircle the record of Henry the Second's expiation—the stone whereon, seven centuries ago, England's proudest monarch knelt barefooted and bareshouldered, bowed down by the weight of his impious revolt against the authority of God, which led to the murder of the heroic Archbishop of Canterbury. Among the usual evening loiterers upon that

beautiful height might have been seen two strangers—Lady Maud Meredith and Mdlle. Dubourg. The former was gazing with a painfully-intent expression at the enclosed stone, shrinking perhaps from the thought of her royal countryman's deep humiliation, and of the greatness of the expiation required for wrong-doing born of pride.

They had arrived little more than an hour before, but Maud was too restless to wait until the morning to see if the loveliness of the view merited all the praise she had heard of it. In Paris, about three weeks after her departure from Venice, she had met some Irish friends of her girlhood, who had just come from Normandy, and their accounts of the magnificent Abbey of Mont St. Michel—the island Basilica, which at one hour seems

to rise out of the ocean's midst, at another to reign in dreary grandeur over a desert of sand —and of the neighbourhood of Avranches, altogether had inspired her with the fancy to go there. It appeared a perfect resting-place, free, for her, from 'the hum, the shock of men,' from the inroad of acquaintances belonging to her circle in England. The reality, however, proved like the inviting-looking fruit on the Dead Sea shore, bitter as soon as tasted.

The very beauty of all around, and the stillness of that old Norman town, with its wealth of historical and legendary memories, seemed to weigh upon her spirits; she had gained nothing by so complete a change from the glaring Boulevards and noisy gaiety of Paris. Joseph Bertram had been a true prophet—go where she might the recollection

of that evening on the Lido at Venice pursued her.

Surely she had not merited his bitter condemnation? But even when she succeeded in stifling for a moment the memory of that accusing voice, it was only to fall a prey to the torments of jealousy. She knew too well that Mildred Lindsay was not likely to be the object of a passing fancy, and the more she thought over the past, the more it seemed to her that Alfred had indeed given himself up completely to the charm of the Lindsays' society. Perhaps even now he was enjoying with Mildred the happiness which he had not found in his own home! Maud would have given all she possessed in the world to know if it were so, but she was too high-minded to try to surprise his secret by returning unannounced to England, and

too proud to question him or anyone else on such a subject.

Thus a prey to jealousy and to growing remorse, which, battle as obstinately as she could against it, gained ground every day, she sought in vain for that repose which she had hoped to find in quiet, and surrounded by every attraction that nature could give to the country in the golden summer time. Avranches wearied her, but whither should she go? Not to either of her homes, London or Chiltern Park; yet what other place had any interest for her, now that her heart was too ill at ease to enjoy the pleasures of the world and of gratified vanity? All companionship became distasteful; she gave Mdlle. Dubourg leave to visit her family at Nantes, while she remained alone with her maid at Avranches.

CHAPTER XV.

Her angel's face,
As the great eye of heaven, shyneth bright,
And made a sunshine in the shady place.—SPENCER.

A DAY or two afterwards, as Maud sat in one of the shady alleys of the pretty botanical gardens, listlessly turning over the pages of a book, the sound of the adjoining convent bell caught her attention, and, remembering that the nuns had told her there was to be Salut that afternoon, she hastened to the little chapel, glad of any diversion from her own thoughts.

She chose a place near the door and rested her head wearily upon her hand, but just as

the bell ceased to ring a sweet perfume of flowers wafted by, a young lady passed up the aisle with bunches of fresh lilies and roses in her hands and knelt before the altar of our Blessed Lady. A ray of light from the side window fell slantingly on the bowed head, and like a flash of lightning recurred to Maud her Eddy's last greeting to Mildred Lindsay: 'I like yoo, because yoo so pretty, yoo's got hair that s'ines like my goldy fish.'

A dimness came over her eyes, yet they never wandered from that kneeling figure. A lay sister appeared bringing vases, the flowers were placed upon the altar, the young lady glided to a seat close by, and the Benediction began. But Maud could not pray; that graceful golden-haired girl's unseen face seemed to flit before her as Mildred's living portrait. Soon the little congregation slowly

dispersed, and as the young lady rose and turned to leave the church her eyes and Lady Maud's met.

'Oh Mademoiselle, I said the heat would be too much for you,' exclaimed Jeannette, meeting her young mistress at the church door and wrapping a cloak round her; 'you look so flushed and your hands tremble.'

'It is nothing,' she replied, 'or rather it is only the unexpected sight of an old friend which has given me a brighter colour than seems good to your over-watchful eyes, my good Jeannette; Lady Maud Meredith is in the church, I have not seen her since my great sorrow, and so many memories have come thronging back. . . . I must wait here for her. I could not ask her dignified Ladyship to share my wee pony-carriage, so please

to get in and drive as far as the College, I will meet you there.'

'It will only be excitement and fatigue for you, Mademoiselle, and heaven knows you are little able to bear either; better let the carriage wait, and if Madam is too grand to go in it, she can stand beside and talk to you while you will be seated, instead of standing or walking.'

'Indeed I will not tire myself, so pray do as I have said.'

To Lady Maud the shock had been so great as almost to make her doubt the evidence of her own sight. Mildred Lindsay in a Catholic church and received by a sister as a well-known and looked-for visitor! Maud waited until her agitation had somewhat subsided and then went out intending to call at the convent and ask the name of the lady

who had presented the beautiful flowers, but as the church-door closed behind her Mildred herself advanced with a smile of cordial greeting.

'This meeting is indeed an unexpected pleasure, Lady Maud.'

'Miss Lindsay!' exclaimed Maud, drawing back haughtily.

Silently for a moment each gazed at the other, the one in sorrowful amazement, the other in proud disdain. Yet Maud's glance was the first to be lowered, there was something in the unclouded light of the eyes so steadily fixed on hers, which awed her, in spite even of her anger and indignation. It had only needed that sight of Mildred, with her winning grace of appearance and manner, to fan into a flame the jealousy of which Joseph had laid the train. All the past time

since her husband and Mildred first met in the grounds at Chiltern Park seemed to rise before her as in a panorama in which every trifling incident revealed the growth of their mutual attraction for each other. Then Mildred's abrupt departure from England, Alfred's continual absence from home, and his refusal to go to Italy, all bore but one interpretation. And now, with more than an actress's art, Mildred comes up to her—his wife, and offers her hand in the guise of friendship! Not trusting herself to speak, Maud bowed slightly, and would have passed on without seeking any explanation; but Mildred, free from all embarrassment, from her utter unconsciousness of everything regarding Alfred, followed her.

'How have I so deeply offended you, Lady Maud?' she asked sadly. 'Whatever

apparent rudeness I may have been guilty of in leaving England without taking leave of you, believe me, it was unavoidable. If you could only know what it cost me to sever with one determined stroke all the associations of that time, with its bright transient joys and unutterable sorrow, you would not so resent that breach of politeness—'

'This is too much!' interrupted Maud, exasperated beyond endurance by what seemed to be so bold a piece of acting. 'You rob me of my husband's affection and you feign astonishment that I refuse to speak to you, and attribute my resentment to a paltry informality! Alfred may have been indifferent before, but at least, he never *loved* another until you came between us. Oh! that unfortunate hour when I listened to the

praise of your fatal talents and confided my children to your care!'

A strange pang darted through Mildred's side at the first words of her companion's passionate interruption, and for an instant she gasped for breath, but by force of will she conquered the pain and remained silent until Maud's own vehemence exhausted her and forced her to pause.

'Adieu, Lady Maud, you have indeed proved—had proof been needed—that sooner or later, from want of charity and generosity, nearly always springs injustice'—she said with chilling composure, and turned into the gardens the entrance to which they had just passed, feeling unable to reach the college without rest or assistance.

Maud trembled with rage. What did it all mean: first Joseph and then Mildred, the

guilty one, dare to reproach her the injured, innocent victim? Did Mildred intend to deny that which facts proved so clearly against her and Alfred? The desire to know all, to wring from Mildred the acknowledgment of her fault, became irresistible.

'Since you forced me to speak to you, Mildred Lindsay, you must feel that we cannot part thus. Is my husband here now?' she asked, following her to the first seat near the gate.

If Mildred had been cruelly wounded and insulted she was now in some degree avenged, as the proud Lady Maud stood before her waiting for an answer, and dependent upon her for relief from the torture of jealousy which had overpowered even her pride. Mildred would have been more than human had she desired to end that suffering, or con-

descended to defend herself by offering any explanation.

'There are questions so unreasonable as to merit no answer, such as the question you have just asked. I have never injured you or given you any right to cross-examine me.'

'Never injured me! What then is injury? Who detained my husband from his home on that wretched morning when I received your well-planned note of adieu, and while our only son, my darling Eddy, was dying? I seem to hear again the wailing voice, now for ever stilled in death, asking for his father.'

'Eddy dead, and I knew it not! the loving bright little fellow; poor mother, no wonder that grief should have driven you nearly distracted!'

'And you say you have never injured me?' continued Maud, too excited to heed the in-

terruption, or see the tears that fell heavily upon Mildred's dress, stealing through the closed fingers of the hand so tightly pressed against her throbbing brow. 'I loved that child with a love that knew no bounds, and yet as he lay dying in my arms and others had told him—I could not—that he was going to a happier home, where we all hoped to follow him some day—almost his last words were: "Tell papa to come soon and to bring Milly." Milly—before his mother! Even with him you had supplanted me; and while I watched alone over my little darling's waning life, my husband was dallying with you —'

'It is false,' cried Mildred, with a sudden flash of her old vehemence; 'Captain Meredith was not with me on that sad, sad morning, there must be some mistake.'

'No, no, there is no mistake; Alfred returned from Ireland by the early mail which arrives in London before eight, and he was seen coming out of your villa about eleven. Had he come direct from the train he would not have found his son already dead. It is true that the shock seemed to recall him to a certain sense of duty, and for a few weeks remorse kept him at my side. But by degrees the impression wore off, and his absences became longer than ever; doubtless they had never before been so charmingly occupied. I was ordered to Italy for my health, he refused to accompany me, but generously gave me *carte blanche* to go where I liked. I was foolishly blind until some weeks ago, when a new sorrow and deception brought also this wretched revelation. By mere accident I came here, saw

you in one of our churches, not received as a penitent but as an honoured visitor; yet of hypocrisy I had hitherto believed you guiltless. I wished to pass in silence, but you forced me to speak. Henceforth if you can put aside the thought of the suffering of a bereaved mother and deserted wife, then, even I, your victim, do not envy you, for one so hardened could never know what real joy—'

'Stop, Lady Maud! I have listened to you with greater patience than I believed it possible for me to exercise towards anyone, but you are Eddy's mother. I sailed from Southampton on the eve of the day you allude to; Father Herbert can give you any particulars about my departure that you may wish to know, also regarding Captain Meredith's presence at Richmond on that unhappy morning. Adieu.'

She stood up, bowed, and walked towards the gate.

'God knows I meant not to be unjust towards you,' exclaimed Maud, inspired by Mildred's manner with a sudden fear that perhaps after all she had accused her wrongfully. 'Be merciful, then, and answer me fully. I have suffered enough for the last few weeks to merit this consideration at least. Is it true that my husband loved you? On your simple word I will accept whatever you tell me.'

'Ten minutes ago, Lady Maud, you would have pleaded in vain. I could afford to be misjudged, and would have uttered no word to free you from the suffering produced by a false impression; but the thought of dearest little Eddy's death has softened into compassion the resentment due to your

harsh, rash judgment. If you will come to me to-morrow morning I will give you as full an explanation as you may desire. This evening my strength is exhausted, I have been ill, and it is as much as I can do to reach the carriage which is waiting for me at a short distance. Be merciful in your turn, and leave me now. Jeannette will go to you to-morrow and show you the way to my house. If this arrangement pleases you, tell me your address, if not—'

'The Hôtel de Londres,' said Maud quickly, startled by so strange an answer, yet subdued by Mildred's increasing paleness.

'*Au revoir*, then; but remember, that although I will send Jeannette, I shall consider you still perfectly free to keep this appointment or not as you may feel inclined in the morning.'

CHAPTER XVI.

Our bodies are our gardens; to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce; set hyssop, and weed up thyme . . . why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.

SHAKESPEARE.

'A FRENCH servant asks to see your ladyship,' said Maud's own maid, entering her room on the following morning. 'I told her your ladyship had passed a restless night, and that I did not much expect you would—'

'Pray form no expectations about me,' replied Maud, impatiently; 'show her up at once, and ask her to wait in the drawing-room until I come.'

The past night had indeed been a restless

one to Maud. Her pride shrank from the indignity of accepting the proposed interview, since Mildred had so markedly signified that she desired it not as an occasion for justifying herself, but granted it rather as a favour; yet the clamour of jealous curiosity would not be silenced. Maud was bitterly conscious that there must be some truth in Joseph's assertions, for Mildred had said nothing which seemed to deny that Alfred loved her. The moment before the maid had come into the room she was still undecided as to whether she would keep the appointment or not, but no sooner had the door closed again than she dressed herself for going out.

'Madame wishes to come with me to my mistress?' said Jeannette, curtseying as Maud entered the salon.

'Yes,' she replied, too much absorbed by conflicting feelings to observe the resentful manner of the faithful servant. After they had gone a little way, however, it occurred to her that she had not acknowledged their former acquaintance, and she asked suddenly—

'Do you not remember me, Jeannette?'

'Certainly, I should have remembered Madame, even if I had not known to whom I was coming.' She paused and looked up hesitatingly, there was not much to re-assure her in the expression of Lady Maud's stern handsome face, yet she added in a low voice: 'Oh! Madame, try not to agitate Mademoiselle; God only knows if yesterday evening's work has not already hollowed out her tomb.'

'What do you mean? . . . I can only say

it grieves me to hear that Miss Lindsay should make the most private matters a subject for idle talk.'

'Madame deceives herself,' cried Jeannette hotly; 'no private matters relating to her or to anyone else have ever been confided to me by Mademoiselle. I only know that she met Madame yesterday, that she imprudently sat down to rest in the gardens when the ground was still damp from the morning's rain, that she came back to the carriage quite exhausted, that she is very feverish to-day with all the appearance of a bad cold. In the beginning of the spring the doctor told me he hoped the warm weather would restore her, but great care was necessary as a severe cold coming quickly after her long illness would overtax her already enfeebled constitution; and now—'

Jeannette did not finish the sentence, and Maud was strongly moved: all this did not seem like the history of a happy love-intrigue, and she knew not herself how much softness stole into her voice when she resumed the conversation after a short pause.

'And now you must get her well again with the aid of this bright hot sunshine. Her grief for her brother, I believe, was excessive?'

'You may well say that, Madame,' returned Jeannette, disarmed by this change of manner and yielding to her natural love of talking, especially of her young mistress, whom she looked upon almost as her own child. 'I shall never forget the Sunday week after his death. It was in the evening. I had been seeking her all over the house when I thought of going into his room, and there I saw her kneeling at the table, her head resting upon

an open book. I took her in my arms, and half carried her to the little sofa near the window, but with a shiver she turned away from the pretty view of the river that she used to be so fond of and whispered: "I have said good-bye to all this—to all that I loved best. I dare not stay here, you must pack up everything, Jeannette, and we will start for France to-morrow."'

'It was then Sunday evening!' Maud said in a low tone to herself, but Jeannette heard and thought it was a question addressed to her.

'Yes, madame, and I thought, when she spoke of going away in such a hurry, it was something she had seen in the book—a prayer book of Mr. Charles's—that had disturbed her for the moment, but in the morning she said we were to go that evening. If Madame

had seen the expression in her face as she drove away from the door she would know what the look of a broken heart is like. Mademoiselle's was broken that night I am sure, and one would say there must have been more than the natural grief for a brother that so crushed it. We stayed a little time in the neighbourhood of Paris, and then came on here ; she fancied Avranches from having visited it with Mr. Charles during his last vacation before leaving Rennes.'

'Yet without friends what distraction could so dull a place afford her? And the illness of which you spoke was immediately after leaving England last summer?'

'No Madame, not for some months later; Mademoiselle had no acquaintances and declined to make any, even after she became such a friend of M. le Curé.'

'Monsieur le Curé! but Miss Lindsay was not a Catholic!'

'She is now, *que le bon Dieu en soit loué* and if it would not weary Madame I will tell her how it came to pass.'

'I shall be very glad to hear it.' Maud could not repress the slight shudder which crept over her at the remembrance of all she had said to Mildred on the previous day.

'Well, Madame, from the time Mademoiselle came here she was like a sister of charity, only she was so rich she could help the poor more than any nun could. Still she grew thinner and thinner, and the heart-broken look never left her face. One day towards the end of October, as we returned from a walk through the village of *Le Marais*, we saw a girl crouched down at the foot of the mission cross outside the church, and crying

bitterly, while the curé seemed endeavouring to console her. We waited at a little distance until he left her, and then Mademoiselle asked what was the matter. It seemed that the poor young thing, after having earned money enough to pay for a substitute, if her betrothed should draw a bad number, had given her little store to the old aunt with whom she had lived since her parents died, and who took it into her head that she would be cured of an inward disease if she could only get the means to go up to one of the Paris hospitals. She comforted her niece with the assurance that after her recovery she would easily be able to repay her, as she was an expert workwoman. That day when we passed, the poor girl had just received news of her aunt's death, and that her lover had drawn a bad number. "Then her sacrifice

has been wasted," exclaimed Mademoiselle— I tried always to keep in my mind, as nearly as I could, the curé's answer, since it appeared to have brought the happiness of faith to my dear young mistress. "Only in appearance," he said, "and does not the sacrifice of our Lord himself often *seem* offered uselessly for his ungrateful children? With such an example before her, poor Melanie's trust in the eventual reward of her suffering cannot waver. God asks not sacrifices from his creatures without renewing daily for them, and in their presence, the sacrifice of his own life." "Tell Melanie to grieve no more, all shall be well with her, but ask her to pray for one who had a harder sacrifice to make, and without the strength of her defined faith," replied Mademoiselle as she bowed, and walked on before the curé

had time to thank her, or even to ask her name. As soon as we got home she sent off a letter to him, with an order for the price of the substitute, and then said, turning to me, "Jeannette, it must be true, there can be no real religion without a perpetually renewed sacrifice; ask your good friend, the curé of this parish, to come and see me to-morrow." . . . I nearly cried for joy, Madame, but I saw Mademoiselle look so pale and tired that I only answered a few words, and induced her to go to bed. The next day, she was unable to rise, and that was the beginning of her long illness; but with "the faith" there seemed to come a brightness into her eyes which chased away the dark sorrow-stricken expression; and now, in spite of her delicate health, she appears to look happier every day. Madame must forgive me, I have been

too long, but when I begin to talk of Mademoiselle I never know when to stop.'

'You have not tired me; on the contrary, I thank you for having told me; I was surprised to see Miss Lindsay in church yesterday.'

It cost her no slight exertion to speak thus calmly and master the tumult of her own feelings. Reparation for injustice had always been a maxim of her stern code of virtue, how then was she to meet Mildred? How far had each wronged the other?

CHAPTER XVII.

Le dévouement a ses hardiesses comme le génie.
MADAME SWETCHINE.

A FEW steps further on Jeannette stopped before a gate which she unfastened and held open for her ladyship to pass in.

'I will wait here while you announce my arrival to Miss Lindsay,' said Maud, sitting down upon one of the garden seats: a strange feeling of nervousness had come over her.

When Jeannette returned after a few minutes' delay, Maud rose without any apparent hesitation and followed her into a room which the sunshine, peering through the

closed *persiennes*, filled with a softened light, with the beauty of brightness without the glare, a fitting type indeed of the fair girl who sat by the hearth whereon smouldered a few logs of pine wood. She stood up as her visitor was ushered in, and while drawing forward an inviting *causeuse* apologised for receiving Lady Maud in her dressing-room; she had caught cold, she said, and it rendered her so very chilly, that she had even been obliged to have a fire made.

'It seems as if our meeting yesterday was to be the cause of a double remorse to me,' said Maud with a sort of proud humility. 'I hope you will forgive whatever wrong I may have done you in word or thought, but how can I forgive myself for having caused you to take cold, exposing you, perhaps, to a renewal of your illness?'

'That was unintentional; it is, therefore, no subject for pardon, either from your own conscience or from me.'

Mildred reseated herself, and seemed as if waiting for her companion to begin the conversation. Maud looked earnestly at her as she sat with her eyes bent upon the fire, and could see no sign of illness, only an increased brilliancy of colouring which added to her beauty, and a jealous pang again pierced her heart.

'You know the question I would repeat,' she said abruptly, too much agitated to measure her words: 'is it true or not that my husband loved you?'

'It is true! but I only learned it when by chance we met, met for the last time, on the day of my brother's funeral. This was my reason for leaving England—'

'In order to avoid him? Then *you* did not share his unworthy feelings?'

A vivid flush spread over Mildred's face and neck; she could not bear to hear him blamed, and her eyes seemed to dilate as they rested full upon Maud.

'I? I loved him better than myself, than life, than everything save his own happiness.'

'And you dare to tell this to me, to his wife!'

'Yes; for had his wife *so* prized his happiness, all this misery for him, for her, and for me, had been spared! and *because* I loved him so well, I found strength to go away without seeing him again, and to bid him an eternal adieu by letter. Since that time I have never even indirectly heard of him until yesterday; be satisfied, then, Lady

Maud, I have never injured you, you alone have injured yourself.'

Mildred had spoken with the rapidity of intense excitement. Her ardent unconventional nature had flashed out in those words, but the next moment she sank back in her chair exhausted and half alarmed at the thought of her own daring. Maud shuddered in spite of herself. Was Mildred right, had Joseph been right, when each in turn accused her of being the cause of misery to her husband and to them? Every deeper feeling of her heart had been wounded, her pride of virtue humbled; she had heard her husband's love for another fully acknowledged, and half distracted by pain and jealousy she answered with a suspiciousness unworthy of herself—

'*You* offered to give me, if I wished for it,

a full explanation of the *facts* that have been related to me, and instead of that you reproach *me*! Of such reproaches I naturally take no notice, and cannot sufficiently wonder at their boldness. It is utterly incomprehensible to me how you could allow such a feeling as you almost boast of entertaining towards Captain Meredith to grow up in your heart for one whom you never knew save as a husband and father. Neither have you in any way accounted for his presence at Richmond on the morning after you say you left River View.'

'Once more, in memory of the little angel child to whom I owe so much, I will answer you, Lady Maud,' replied Mildred quietly—the fire of her nature would not be roused again, at least by any offence against herself; 'you offered to accept on my simple word

whatever I should tell you, and therein I recognised your own love of truth which preserved you from a narrow-minded distrust of the truthfulness of others, now you seem inclined to doubt. . . . I referred you yesterday to Father Herbert for any proof you might desire regarding my departure, and for information of what occurred on the following morning. As for the rest it had better remain unexplained; you are free to think of me as you like, for without censuring where I have no right to censure, I could not show how circumstances led me insensibly to make Captain Meredith's happiness the object of all my thoughts and hopes, although I knew that only through others could I attain that object. I repeat, from Captain Meredith and Father Herbert you can obtain full verification of the *facts* that I

have stated. And now, had we not better say farewell? I am ashamed to say again I am not well, but—'

A short cough interrupted the sentence and she bent her face upon her hand wishing to conceal the spasm of pain that for an instant contracted her features. Maud saw it however, stood up, and walked to the other side of the room. The sight of physical pain and weakness momentarily conquering that strength of will which had rendered Mildred so completely mistress of the occasion moved her deeply, it was the first evidence of real illness she had seen in her rival.

'You only did me justice when you said my own love of truth preserved me from distrust,' she said, returning to her seat. 'I desire no verification of anything you have asserted, it was the smarting of a sorely-

wounded heart that stung me into uttering words of seeming doubt. But I cannot go without insisting, as far as I may, upon hearing the particulars of all that has been so strange in our mutual relations, since it appears you only hesitate to speak in order to avoid censuring *me*. You will admit it is impossible for me to accept indulgence from one who, whether through her fault or not, has detached from me the affection to which I had the most sacred right. If you can show me that by neglecting any real duty I have caused others to suffer I believe I shall have courage to acknowledge my fault and try to repair it.'

Was the natural good in Maud's character then not dead? Was it only dormant under the heavy covering of pride and egotism, and needing but a shock to rouse it from that fatal sleep. A ray of hope darted into Mildred's

mind, and with that hope came new strength. Oh! if a frank, simple relation of all that had passed since her first acquaintance with the Merediths could teach Lady Maud the deformity of that egotistical pride through which, whilst professing to follow the guidance of a *super*-natural religion, she had neglected a woman's highest *natural* duty—that of giving happiness! Mildred's eyes grew dim, the joy foreshadowed in that hope was too great! She hesitated to yield to it and only answered after a long pause—

'If I go into this sad history, Lady Maud, I must be very frank; and, on your part, will it not be subjecting yourself to a painful ordeal, for I can but relate the motives and details of that which I have already told you?'

'I have lately become so accustomed to

the atmosphere of suffering that I can bear without complaint a still heavier pressure. You need fear no interruption from me.'

At first Mildred's voice was weak and tremulous, but as she proceeded her hesitation gradually disappeared. With the vivid reality of the actual hour her memory sketched the scene of that last Sunday evening at Richmond, when she stood in the room of her dead brother alone, so utterly alone, yet haunted by the consciousness of her power to make glad the life of one too dearly loved; her sense of duty overpowered at last by the longing to accept that forbidden but most sweet power; and the victory retained for good by the same love which, a moment before would have dragged her downwards; but then, speaking through the 'pictured image' of a little child—his child—drew her

up even to the height of that 'masterpiece of virtue which love is in its essence and its summit.'

She paused for an instant, overcome herself by the recollection of that hour, and then added—

'It was, though I knew it not, from the dying bed of your little Eddy that there came to me the angel whisper warning me not to prepare an after-suffering for his dear father, and with that warning came a blessed re-assurance. I might not give my life *to* him whom I so loved, but I could give it *for* him. At that moment when I vowed never to meet him again, and the light of existence died out of my heart for ever, I asked God to accept my life as the price of his happiness; to inspire her, whose envied right it was to be devoted to him with a true under-

standing of her duties. And I feel that my prayer will be granted some day, for God Himself has given me a divine pledge, in leading me, in spite of my reluctance, to the true faith—alone large enough to fill the void of a broken heart, as it alone is the religion of perpetual sacrifice. We may never meet again on earth, Lady Maud, but do not forget that to hear of his happiness with you would make me blest, even in this world. I have pained you—perhaps you still think, injured you; take a most noble revenge, let me have to thank *you* for giving me, while still among you, the joy that I would have purchased with my life!'

She stood up wishing to terminate the interview at once, for the excitement which had given her fictitious strength was becoming more than she could control; Maud

rose also, but remained silent. She felt her own littleness in the presence of that beauty which 'detaches us from ourselves in inspiring the ineffable madness of love.' Her old enemy, however, made a final struggle; it surely was not necessary to humiliate herself so far as to acknowledge this to her rival? She bowed as if accepting Mildred's desire that they should part thus, but, before reaching the door, some irresistible attraction made her look back, and as her eyes fell upon Mildred, who stood half supported by the table, the last remains of her stubborn pride crumbled away, and she exclaimed impetuously—

'Mildred! I never knew until now, what real love and virtue were; teach me how to acquire them.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.—TENNYSON.

MILDRED'S most daring hope had never gone beyond the idea that perhaps the relation of her history, by leading to reflection on the past, might at some future day produce a happy change in her whom it so nearly concerned, and the almost involuntary cry of homage which burst from Maud's lips, was to her like the first note of some jubilant song of victory, which she had never expected to hear save in heaven; but the sudden rush of

joy proved too much for the weak, mortal frame already half spent by 'the shock of the fight.'

An attack of intermittent fever laid its iron grasp upon her, and even when the violence of the disorder had passed, there appeare d no sign of rallying strength; still, even Jeannette's resentment against Lady Maud, as the cause of this relapse, was disarmed by her sorrow and untiring attention, as day after day she spent hours by the bedside of the poor young sufferer. Remorse taught her humility, the scales of self-delusion fell from her eyes, and by degrees she came to recognise the worse than folly of her own pretensions to superiority, especially when seen by the side of unexacting affection, and in one so gifted as Mildred.

At length, one warm sunny day, Mildred

obtained permission to have her sofa wheeled out under the verandah at the back of the house, and Maud seated herself beside her. The scene and hour conduced to reverie : it was late in the afternoon, and the haze which floated over the rich green valley beneath, creeping upwards through the woods of the Naffrée, tinged them with ever-varying hues of pink and gold. In the distance rose that superb monument of the faith and artistic genius of the middle ages, the Abbey of Mont St. Michel. The light clouds which drifted over the sky made the surrounding desert sands look grey and solemn, whilst still further away, a white wavy line crept over them, telling of the great sea which would soon convert their entire surface into a sheet of foaming water, and recalling the beautiful tradition belonging to *la croix des*

grèves—the cross erected in commemoration of the loving daring of a young mother who braved the dangers of a pilgrimage across the moving quicksands in the simple hope of thereby meriting for her unborn child the special protection of the great archangel, and her faithful trust in his intercession, even when, lost in the fog, and her hour of pain prematurely brought on by fatigue and terror as the sound of the rising tide drew nearer and nearer. 'Seeing herself thus deprived of all human aid,' relates the ancient manuscript of Dom Hugues, 'she had again recourse to St. Michael, beseeching him to protect her in this extremity, which the saint did in a manner truly admirable. The sea arriving made a circle round her, so that it rose to twelve feet, leaving her untouched as in the middle of a well, and there a son was born unto her,

whom she baptised with the waters of the sea.'

With a strange persistence the thought of that legend, symbolising the power of love and of trust, came back to Lady Maud's mind as then for the first time, with Mildred beside her, she gazed upon that view so rich in natural beauty, and upon the still dry sands between Mont St. Michel and Tombelaine—the site of *la croix des grèves.*

'Lady Maud,' said Mildred abruptly, breaking in upon that silent meditation, 'you have made these last few weeks to me as the holiday-time is to a child who has been for weary months surrounded by strangers, and then meets a former friend and companion of the dear home days, who tends and cheers her through illness, but it would be sorry gratitude for all your good-

ness to detain you here any longer. I remember that in August no one was ever absent from your beautiful home at Chiltern Park, and I feel that you must long to see all your dear ones again.'

'I do long to see Alfred!' Maud exclaimed, quickly, without raising her eyes. They had never spoken so directly of him since that first day when she had asked, 'Is it true that my husband loves you?' 'Yet I dread to meet him—*how* shall we meet? . . . In any case I could not think of leaving Avranches until you are able to walk out again—until you are at least as well as when I came.'

Mildred looked at her with an incredulous smile.

'You know that will never be again.'

'God forbid that I should know anything of the kind. *You* have taught me the dif-

ference between justice and generosity, and if only to be true to your own principles you must get well; otherwise I shall feel very much like a murderess, and although, in justice, perhaps such a punishment would not be too severe, it would not be generous in you to will to inflict it . . . I certainly will not leave you here alone until you are recovered.'

'You would not leave me alone, you would leave me a remembrance and a hope; I could not feel lonely with such days as these to live over again in thought, and the knowledge that they were a pledge of the realisation of my heart's dearest desire. Dear Lady Maud, forgive me if I say aught to pain you, but each day that separation is protracted between those who ought to be united the wider it becomes.'

'I know it, alas! too well; but—' Maud hesitated and blushed—'I love as I never loved in my girlhood, when he so fondly sought me, and if I went back now without any reason to hope that I had not become utterly indifferent to him, we should remain as virtually separated as ever. I could not plead for full forgiveness, since out of his great generosity alone he might grant it to me, and it would drive me mad to think that his heart did not ratify the pardon. If he would come to me at my request, urged with all the earnestness of an ardent desire to see him whilst detained here by illness of a dear friend—I have not told him that I have seen you—then I should know that the former love was not quite dead, and I could beg as the humblest of supplicants for forgiveness; but if he refused to come, how could I bear the

wretched certainty of his indifference! What shall I do?'

Mildred made no reply. Could she encourage the hope that Alfred would come at the request of one who had for so long outraged all his best feelings, whilst, according to her idea, Lady Maud ought to be ready to subject herself gladly to any humiliation to regain, even after the lapse of years, a little of that affection which had once been all her own. For an instant her heart closed towards his wife and rebelled against the duty which had forced her to abandon him to his cheerless fate. But all suddenly a new radiance beamed from her countenance as sweet voices whispered in her ear, 'You have now the power to complete your own work.'

As those sweet voices died away she recognised that Lady Maud's hesitation to seek

her husband was no longer the offspring of pride, but the shrinking timidity of a love which had not confidence in its own power to re-awaken an answering feeling, and had not yet attained the height of forgetting all self-consciousness in the thought of labouring for the beloved one's eventual good ; and Mildred resolved that the encouragement Lady Maud needed should at least appear to be granted to her. Still she remained silent, and it was only when Jeannette came to warn her not to remain out too long, that either of them spoke again.

'You know Alfred, do you think he would come at my request?' said Maud hurriedly, as if ashamed of such a question, yet urged to it by an irrepressible longing for some assurance from one who ought to know so well what his feelings towards her were.

'Yes!' If there was aught of untruth in that answer, 'the recording angel' must surely have blotted out the stain with a tear of tender admiration.

Accordingly Maud wrote to her husband as she had seldom, if ever, written before, and asked him to come to her. She felt 'like some poor mountaineer,' she said, 'who thought not of the beauty of his native hills while he lived beneath their protecting shade, but when unavoidably detained in other lands, learned to pine for them with a restless impatience. In her case the spirit of the mountains himself could come to her and make the present brighter than the past had ever been—would he come?'

Once upon a time that playful letter, with its under-current of real anxiety to see him, would have given Alfred intense delight.

Alas! it came too late, he threw it aside with a muttered 'What stuff!' and, after allowing a week to pass, answered that he was too much occupied superintending the formation of an aviary in the hazel-grove at Chiltern Park to think of going abroad for the present.

'Then his only feeling towards me is one of indifference,' reasoned Maud, 'since he so coldly refuses the proffered reconciliation!' 'And after all,' suggested the tempter, eagerly seizing such an occasion to rouse the old proud spirit, 'was she the one that most needed pardon? She at least had been faithful to her marriage vow in thought, word, and deed.' But at the same moment Joseph's reproaches recurred to her with stinging bitterness. Had she been faithful, not according only to the 'letter which kills,' but according to the 'spirit which giveth life,'

creating love, and love's fairest flower—humility?

Not in so many words did she ask herself that question, it was the unspoken accusation which had been growing stronger and stronger in the silence of her own heart ever since Joseph had dared to claim her love as a right—a right which her conduct to her husband had given him; and above all since she had learned to compare in Mildred and herself the difference between the winning power of devotedness, even when springing from the grave of a conquered weakness, and the cold rectitude of unloving virtue.

Death had robbed her of her favourite child; the friend in whom she had most trusted had heaped humiliation and insult upon her, and with the craving for the once-despised treasure of her husband's affection

came the knowledge that she had lost it—perhaps beyond recall. But suffering had nearly done its work, since even at the moment, when, writhing under the pain inflicted by Alfred's letter, she could think of others—it was the usual time of her visit to Mildred and she would not defer it.

A few hours before she had met the Doctor accidentally, and in answer to her earnest request to know the exact truth about Mildred's state, he had said her days were numbered; attacks of acute disease and violent nervous shocks acting on a naturally fragile constitution had exhausted all vital energy, and she might pass away without suffering, in one of the fainting-fits which had latterly become so frequent. As her physical strength waned, however, her power to charm and console those around her seemed to

increase. It was impossible to give way to grief before her while she looked so happy, and Maud tried to hide the double anguish that was gnawing at her heart as she went to her after receiving Alfred's letter.

CHAPTER XIX.

La beauté c'est la transfiguration, c'est la lumière . . . plus les créatures participent et approchent de la beauté de Dieu, plus elles sont belles.—SAVONAROLA.

MILDRED was reclining upon the sofa in her favourite corner under the verandah, and the varied tints of the flowers as they clustered in profusion round the wooden pillars, seemed as it were reflected in the brilliant and ever-changing colour upon her cheeks.

'How well you look, Mildred, there among the flowers, rivalling their bloom,' Maud said, almost deluded into hope. 'I do believe this glorious sunshine is drawing you back to earth; you would not refuse to be cured by

this lovely weather, and—and we cannot spare you yet.

> '. . . . Fading roses die
> Although the warm and healing air
> Comes breathing forth to wrap them round,'

repeated Mildred gaily, though her voice rose scarcely above a whisper; 'but as they only die to live again when the coming winter will have passed away, you would not ask them to stay and encounter its frosts and storms?'

A choking sensation rose in Maud's throat, and she turned to pluck a flower; though Irish by birth, she had the true English shyness about any display of emotion.

'Nay, dear Lady Maud, you must not look so grieved, you have known for a long time that I was nearing home—our real home—I have now reached the threshold, and I am

so happy, happy also in the thought of your future happiness.'

'My happiness! Ah! you do not know—' and with a strange impulse in one who a little time ago would have died rather than reveal any humiliation which had been inflicted on her, she took out Alfred's letter. 'Read this.'

'You see he will not come,' she added after a few minutes' pause; 'and, as you said yourself, every hour that our separation is prolonged the more nearly irrevocable it is rendered. Must I go on bearing for ever the terrible responsibility which I have at last learned to know rests upon me—the responsibility of all his faults as well as my own?'

'See what it is to have been always accustomed to unresisting homage! The

slightest repulse is a thing so unknown it makes you despair at once.'

'If I tell him that the friend whom I do not wish to leave is Mildred Lindsay, no doubt he will come quickly enough. Shall I tell him?'

There was a certain involuntary bitterness mingled with the hopelessness of Maud's tone, and Mildred answered sadly—

'No! What would his coming avail if you supposed it was to see another, and not you? If you ask him again and in the name of your old mutual affection, he surely will not refuse.'

'Do you think so? then I will write at once—but I have made you speak too much, forgive my thoughtlessness.'

Mildred was seized with a fit of coughing, and the exhaustion which followed it was

alarming; but at length her breathing became easier, she appeared to sleep, and then Lady Maud stole away wishing to snatch an hour's leisure to write to Alfred.

Immediately after she left however, Mildred called to Jeannette to place the cushions so that she could sit up, and then to bring her writing materials. Jeannette arranged her as she wished, but remained beside the sofa; it was madness, she said, of Mademoiselle to fatigue herself.

'It is little more than an address that I wish to write, but it must be written without delay,' answered Mildred in her firmest manner.

As soon as the writing things were placed for her, she drew from under the pillow that copy of the 'Following of Christ' which had indeed been a *vade mecum* to her ever since she had taken it from her brother's room on

the eve of her departure from Richmond. Her hand trembled as it rested upon the open page of the book, and she murmured to herself—

'My God! do I dare too much? Yet there is no other means. I know that the hope I sought to encourage is vain, but let it *seem* to be fulfilled!'

Slowly, and with evident difficulty, she wrote a few lines in the book, bound it round with a band of paper, and added in addition to the address, *Per Post*, *Immediate*, then enclosed it in an outer covering which she directed to Father Herbert, who had lately been removed to London.

'Send this to the post at once, Jeannette, and see that it is properly prepaid,' she said, as she laid her head down on the pillow with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XX.

Thou found'st me, like the morning sun
That melts the fogs in limpid air.—BURNS.

A FLOOD of light filled the large dining-room at Chiltern Park, as the sun at length burst through the dense mist which, during the first hours of morning, had veiled the green woods and fields as in a shroud. The 'bright Lord of day' sent it rolling away like a golden vapour, shedding jewelled drops alike upon the glimmering leaves of the lofty trees, and the lowly blades of grass as they waved to and fro in the newly-risen breeze. The birds began their chant of joy for the triumph of their great giver of light

and gladness over the lingering mists of gloom. In the interior of the room the oaken panels reflected the costly silver service upon the breakfast-table, and the grave countenance of its solitary occupant alone appeared out of harmony with the universal brightness.

The very beauty and exhilarating freshness of such a morning tended to excite the natural longing for happiness, and caused Alfred's loneliness to seem more drear and chilling to him than ever. An open letter lay upon the table, and, after reading it a second time, he rose and went to his study.

'What is the meaning of this new caprice of Maud's, I wonder?' he mused as he drew a sheet of paper towards him. 'Here is a second letter begging me to go to her, the request urged for the sake of "Auld Lang

Syne." It will be a just punishment for her ladyship to find that she can plead in vain to me ; no doubt, she fancied that one soft word would instantly recall me to her side. It is not so easy to restore life to that which is dead. I gave her credit for more worldly wisdom at least, than to expose herself to the mortification of a refusal, but how well she deserves it!' and he dipped his pen in the ink with a mingled feeling of sadness and triumph.

'My Dear Maud,

'You know that I dislike dull old French towns beyond everything, therefore pray excuse me for not joining you at Avranches ; had it been Paris, though all cities in summer are,—I will not finish the sentence. Alas! that a day should come when a sweet invita-

tion from a fair lady should fail to invest any place where she might be with all the attractions of a land of pure delights. But so it is; whose is the fault, I wonder? Is it Time's?

'I need not say that a welcome awaits you at home whenever you feel inclined to return, but pray do not inconvenience yourself by altering your plans; my great desire is, that you shall do whatever gives you most pleasure.'

He read it over with a smile, and as the mail did not go out till the evening locked it up in his desk muttering at the same time—

'She cannot complain that I do not comply with her desire for an immediate answer, or that I control her liberty in any way, but nothing that she could now do can cancel the past. My life rendered a burden by the tie which deprives me of freedom, without giving

me any of the happiness of a real home—my self-respect lost in the reckless chase after that forgetfulness which alone can save me from despair. God knows that, at an angel's bidding, I tried to build up a new union between my dead boy's mother and myself—neither sunshine nor rain softens rocks. Mildred, from how much misery might *you* not have saved me! I will keep my resolution never to pursue you while you wish to conceal from me your home; but you loved me not if you never seek to learn whether our sacrifice has been of any avail, and if, knowing it has not, you let me long in vain for tidings of you. Milly, let me owe to you the all of happiness that can still be mine!'

The sound of a door made him start and look round as if he expected to see someone enter.

'What nonsense this is,' he exclaimed, standing up and taking down his hat and riding-whip. 'Mildred Lindsay has doubtless conquered any warmer feeling towards me than one of tender regret. Most likely she is married or going to marry some happy fellow abroad who is free to give her his name as well as his love, and that may be the reason why her image has been so strangely present to me of late, not as I last saw her in sorrow and tears, but beaming with a brighter radiance than ever. Are there secret affinities which defy time and space? An unexpected sound, the arrival of the post, sets my heart beating with an absurd feeling of expectation. I see it won't do to remain here, the loneliness of the place, thronged as it is with memories of her, renders it more than I can bear; I will go to London to-morrow and see if I cannot

make up a party of genial spirits for a trip to the Isle of Wight.'

Some hours later, as he returned from a long ride, he met the postman, who handed him a sealed packet; there were no letters. It was something more than the sun's glare which dazzled him as he remained gazing with a fixed stare at the address. Had a spirit appeared at his call he would not have been more agitated, the handwriting was Mildred's. Yes, altered as it was, he could not be mistaken. Was his prayer of that morning, 'Milly let me owe to you the all of happiness that can still be mine,' going to be answered?

Maud had begged him to reply by return of post, but, although, as we have seen, he did write immediately on receipt of her letter, no answer reached Avranches. The pain of

this new, and apparently final repulse was greater than she could conquer for the moment, and some hours passed before she was able to go out again after the arrival of the mail.

CHAPTER XXI.

Led on by Heaven and crowned with joy at last.
SHAKESPEARE.

THE heat of the day had been excessive, and Mildred, who had that morning received the last Sacraments, was so exhausted that she had not insisted as usual on getting up. Towards evening, however, there rose a light breeze from the sea and as it entered at the open window, breathing a reviving freshness into the room, she looked up pleadingly at her fond watchful nurse.

'Jeannette, the oppressive heaviness is gone. I feel the air would do me good, and I should so like to see the sun set once more over

Mont St. Michel. Please to take me to my sofa on the terrace; here comes Lady Maud, and she will promise not to let me stay out too long; you will not refuse me, Jeannette.'

Maud kissed her forehead and stepped out into the garden, while Jeannette, half choked by the rising tears, silently prepared to obey.

After a little time, when Mildred was settled upon her couch, carefully wrapped up, Maud came with some freshly-culled fruit, and gently sought to tempt her with it. For some minutes neither spoke, but Mildred's eyes asked the question which her lips hesitated to utter—'Will he come?'

'Oh! stay until you have made me more like yourself, until you have taught me the secret of suffering gaily,' murmured Maud, avoiding that questioning gaze. 'To lose you

now would be the over-brimming drop in an already full cup of sorrow and regret.'

'Not so, dear Lady Maud, my death must be to you instead of sorrow a pledge of happiness, you will promise me to think of it as such.'

'I cannot, Mildred—my last hope of happiness has vanished. Alfred would not even answer my letter without delay as I besought him. For once, even you have been a false prophet; you see nothing will induce him to come to me.'

Mildred's large eyes, to which the fatal disease only added brilliancy, grew dim, and her breathing became laboured. A faint hope had lurked in her heart that Alfred would arrive that evening, but the last diligence had come and brought no glad tidings for her. As she gazed on the exquisite loveliness of the

scene around, and felt that the time had come for her to say farewell to all created beauty, there arose one throb of yearning to see for the last time in this world the face that she had loved so well, and to receive from those eyes, which knew not how to feign, an assurance that the price offered for his happiness should not be offered in vain. It was not that her faith wavered, she had no doubt that her sacrifice would eventually bear fruit, but from the poor human heart went up the cry for a gleam of supremest joy on earth. Yet almost as soon as the cry rose it was stilled again, she had accepted the idea of approaching death without that gleam which would have indeed made it a sunlit passage from the twilight of this world to the unclouded brightness of eternal day.

She turned her head slowly to where his

wife knelt, self-forgetting at last, and unconscious that never in the hours of her greatest triumphs, radiant with jewels, admired, courted, envied queen of a ball-room thronged with England's lovely daughters, had she looked so truly beautiful as then, kneeling beside a sick couch with all the simplicity of a village maiden. The soft folds of her plain white dress seemed as if bordered by the flowers behind her, and in her whole appearance there was a yielding grace which added to the old royalty of her beauty the poetry of generosity and tenderness.

'If he could only see you at this moment, Lady Maud!' murmured Mildred, speaking the thought which filled her mind.

'Why not have allowed me to tell him that you were here—that you were leaving us, then he would have come.'

'I have already said, because you would not value his coming if you supposed it was for—'

'For you! Yes; the lesson I have had has been so severe! Perhaps if he saw me here at your feet he would understand that I am indeed changed, and might deem me worthy of forgiveness. Oh! I would gladly owe his coming even to you!'

They had not heard the approach of an intruder by the path through the Naffrée, who stood like one transfixed at a little distance from them. Yet he had come at the summons contained in that parcel, the arrival of which had appeared to him like the answer of a spirit to his call. On the title-page of the book the 'Following of Christ'—was traced a little record of 'sublime folly.'

'My God, thou hast conquered. The life

that I may not give to him, I offer to Thee for his happiness. Teach her who has the right to love him to prize that right as I would have prized it, and teach him to forget me in her affection.

'MILDRED LINDSAY.

'June 186–, eve of my departure from River View.'

Underneath was written in trembling characters—

'Alfred, I am dying, give me my reward; go to Avranches as quickly as you can, your wife is now worthy of your love.'

An hour later Alfred had left Chiltern Park, forgetting the letter addressed to Maud in his desk. He would obey Mildred implicitly, he would go to Avranches as quickly as he could, in spite of the well-nigh irresis-

tible temptation to stay and seek her in town —the post-mark on the packet was London— but he would tell Maud that he only came for an hour as she wished it so very much, and that he must return immediately. Meanwhile Mildred was dying, and through that delay, he might, it seemed so him, lose whatever chance he had of ever seeing her again in this world, and that act of simple obedience cost him such tears as a man never sheds but once in his life. But with the thought of her sacrifice before him he would have felt it a sort of sacrilege to disobey her, it had raised him to her own level and he offered her a homage which angels might have envied.

He missed the last diligence from St. Lo on the day when a letter from him had been so anxiously expected, but followed as fast as post-horses can go when the postilion is

promised that every half-hour gained will add to his 'pour-boire.' At Lady Maud's apartments Alfred learned that she had gone to her friend who was very ill. Her maid was out, and the proprietor could only tell him that Madame's friend was a beautiful young English lady who had been living at Avranches for about a year, and was regarded by the poor people as almost an angel on account of her charity, even before M. le Curé had received her into the 'household of faith.' 'He did not remember to have heard the name,' he said, in answer to Alfred's eager question, as the thought darted into his mind that it might be Mildred. The old French bonne who had come with her always called her simply Mademoiselle. If Monsieur wished, the little boy would show him the way to her house.

Alfred bade the child take the shortest way, and followed, as insensible as a blind man to the beauty of that lovely walk. Was he going to see Mildred after all? He tried to reason with himself about the folly of such a thought—'Beautiful, an angel—the old French bonne,' there was nothing in this which might not apply to any other young English lady; and the London postmark on the packet—and the more than improbability that his wife should have become her attendant in illness! . . .

After a short ascent through underwood and brambles, the boy stopped before a small wicket gate. Alfred entered alone and a sudden turn brought him in full view of the terrace. He saw Mildred lying upon the couch with the golden rays of the evening sun encircling her head like an aureole, and

his wife bowed down beside her uttering that passionately sorrowful exclamation, 'I would gladly owe his coming even to you!'

Was he dreaming? he asked himself; was it some scene of enchantment passing before his travel-tired sight? If it were real, *then* there must be superhuman power and beauty in the religion which had become Mildred's, and which had at last taught his wife to speak those marvellous words which seemed to echo in his ear. Before that echo had died away Mildred looked up and their eyes met! He forgot everything save that Mildred was there before him, and that his presence would cause her countenance to light up with a more brilliant loveliness than he had ever seen it wear in her happiest days, and in an instant he had crossed the space which divided them, his hands stretched out to clasp

hers. A glance arrested him, his hands fell by his side as her lips formed the words, 'Your wife!'

He understood that mute appeal, that his first greeting should be to Maud, but it seemed almost too much to ask of him, and he stood still with his eyes fixed on the ground; yet to refuse Mildred? No!—

'Maud, my wife,' he said at length in a hoarse, low tone.

But Maud had seen his expression of rapt delight as he hastened to Mildred's side, and she was not so strong as she fancied. How respond to his greeting when, as his wife, it was evident she was nothing to him in comparison to that dying girl? An involuntary shiver passed over her as he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

'My God! must I die in vain?'

whispered Mildred, as a look of anguish crossed her face.

Alfred alone heard that prayer; it pierced to his very soul, and with a look almost of inspiration he turned to Mildred, as if dedicating to her the final conquest over himself. For an instant his eyes rested upon hers in unutterable love and reverence, then bending over his wife, but without touching her, as if to leave her perfectly free, he said softly—

'Come to me, Maud, my first love!'

Yes, she knew that she was his first love, and as she cast herself into his arms, the barrier of years was broken down; she remembered as if it were yesterday, the day when, at the peril of his life, he had leaped over the gate to be at her side.

'It was because I never deserved such love as yours, Alfred,' she faltered, 'that I was

mad enough to undervalue it. Forgive me, and let me try to regain even a little of it; my punishment is very great, since I have learned to love where I am no longer loved!'

A sweet seal of pardon closed that sentence: such gentle humility in Maud was irresistible . . . And this also was the work of Mildred! A colour lovely as that which precedes the sunrise of a glorious summer morning spread over her face as she witnessed that silent embrace, and even as it faded and her head fell heavily back upon the pillow with a short quick breath, her lips parted in a smile of ineffable happiness: the joys of earth and heaven had indeed met for her in that last supreme hour of seeming consciousness.

She was carried back to bed insensible, and a succession of fainting-fits followed.

The shock had but caused the frail thread of her life to break more quickly than it might otherwise have done, and before the sun rose again over that Norman bay, her soul had received her viaticum, had reached her Home! . . .

Maud and Alfred knelt with clasped hands beside the lifeless remains of her who had been to them, as her name signifies: Mildred —PEACE-BRINGER!

THE END.

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